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SIGNAL FIRE

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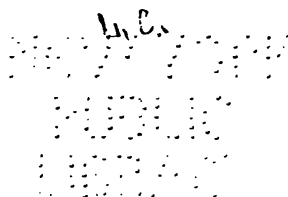


GRAIL FIRE



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JULY 1917

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TO
MARY S. JOHNSON
AND
JOSEPHINE A. LYON,
DEACONESSES OF SAINT HILDA'S HOUSE,
WHO FIRST SHOWED ME THE BEAUTY
OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE.

22217

GRAIL FIRE

True love has but only one intent: and that is, that she might always love truly; for of the love of her Lover has she no doubt, that He does what best is. And she follows this: that she does that that she ought to do. And she wills nought but one thing; and that is, that the Will of God be always in her done.

This soul swims in the sea of joy, that is in the sea of delights, streaming of divine influences. She herself is joy by the virtue of joy that that has merged her in Him. And so is the will of the Loved and the will of this soul turned into one as fire and flame.

THE MIRROR OF SIMPLE SOULS.

GRAIL FIRE

I

BEHIND the dark, looming crest of West Mountain a clear young moon was setting. Mountain and crescent were in league to give the effect of moving to meet each other across the evening sky. The latter hastened, but the former lifted its whole solemn bulk to receive the golden boon. The spruces on the high, serrated crest put forth expectant fingers.

Down in the valley, beside a dim, whispering brook, a boy and a girl stood watching the heavenly consummation. The one—the girl—was aware of the other; but the boy was aware of nothing but the mountain and the moon.

He was about eighteen years old—tall and very slender. In the daytime he had thick fair hair and thoughtful grey-blue eyes. Now he had only an eager outline, as expectant in its lifted attitude as one of the far-away spruces. But the girl had seen him often enough to read into the blurred oval of his face all the significant features that she knew were there and she glanced so frequently from the moon to him that the division of her interest was evident.

She was tall and slender herself, and about his own

age. But where his hair made an obscure brightness in the glimmering dusk, hers lay like a dark cloud; and the blur of her face was dashed with two strong dark eyebrow strokes. Like the night sky above them, the dark grey of her eyes was felt rather than seen.

The silence tingled. From the distant edge of the wood an owl called mournfully; but his voice only helped the murmur of the brook to emphasise the stillness. The mountain seemed fairly to hold its breath. The lower rim of the moon delicately touched the tips of the spruces' fingers.

"Oh!" said the girl.

She could not help it. She was not used to such prolonged, solitary silences, and her oppressed young spirit sought involuntary relief. But immediately she bit her lip and took a step backward, for the boy started violently.

"I—I—oh, excuse me!—I didn't know," he murmured in confusion.

"Of course not. I'm sorry. I'm Eleanor Ramsey," she apologised and explained.

"Yes."

He had recovered himself as quickly as he had confessed his first surprise. His spirit was still intent on the moon, and he did not want to lose one phase of its withdrawal. So he returned to his contemplation, only moving aside as if to invite the girl to share whatever advantage there might be in his position.

"I'm Francis Merwin," he submitted.

"Yes," she echoed him.

The moon was by this time drawing its slim bright-

ness down behind the mountain. One of the spruces stood ragged against it. Slowly, little by little, it sank until there was only a horn, then a tip, left in the sky. Then it withdrew altogether; and, for a wonderful instant, it shone through the trees on the top of the mountain as if it had its home in the forest instead of in the sky. It blazed like a hidden jewel suddenly discovered on West Mountain's crest.

"There!" said the boy. "The Grail!"

It was for the sake of this instant that he had come out to watch.

"Why, so it is!" answered the girl.

She turned and looked at the boy with an air of welcoming and pondering a new idea.

"That's a beautiful suggestion," she added gravely.

They both stood in silence a moment longer. Then the mystic light above them faded, the mountain resumed its huge, dark solidity, and the brief revelation was over. The boy drew a long breath and returned to conscious, explicit dealings with his environment.

A change came over him as he thus dropped from the heights and acknowledged the claim of present fact. The free, self-oblivious confidence of his attitude deserted him, and he grew constrained and awkward, uncertain what to do or say. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, and glanced at his companion through the dusk. It was at once apparent that he was by nature very shy, and that, by experience, he was quite unused to girls.

But Eleanor Ramsey had not for nothing been the queen of the summer colony all that season. Her native

social tact had come to swift maturity. Perhaps it was sympathy rather than tact that prompted her reassuring words; for they rang with unquestionable sincerity—straight from the golden touchstone of her girlish heart.

"Please forgive me if I interrupted you. I didn't mean to, really. I just couldn't stand it any longer not to know what you were looking at."

Francis was gratified. His love of beauty had made it inevitable that he should have taken frequent note of the prettiest girl in the hotel; and he had revered her from a distance. But he had never supposed that she had so much as been aware of his existence.

"You noticed?" he exclaimed guilelessly.

"Yea."

She was amused.

He did not say, "Suppose we sit down for awhile," but she understood that that was because of his shyness. So presently she was frank and brave enough to say it for him. He acquiesced with a swift pleasure which more than made up for his original lack of initiative. He took off his coat and spread it for her on the dewy grass beside the whispering brook.

"I'm still thinking of what you said," she went on after a moment of friendly meditation. "It really is beautiful, that Grail idea. I'm very grateful to you."

"Oh, no, not to me!" he deprecated, with a flash which surprised her.

"Why not?" she asked rather blankly.

"Well——" He hesitated and waited a moment, perhaps hunting for words, perhaps arrested by the very

novelty of talking so openly and seriously to a girl. "Ideas like that come to you," he continued. "You have nothing to do with them. They come of their own accord. That's why they're so important. You wouldn't have half so much faith in them if you made them up."

"Wouldn't you?" She reflected a moment, with her hands about her knees and her eyes in the starlit brook. "I believe I should," she concluded ponderingly. "I never thought of the question before, but I believe I should. If you don't mind, I'm going to insist that just you, and nobody else, has told me about the Grail on West Mountain."

The boy's flush of pleasure at her tone could not be seen in the deepening dusk; but his gratification spoke in his voice as he answered,


"I hope it will mean as much to you as it does to me."

"What does it mean to you?"

Eleanor stirred and brought her eyes back from the brook, trying to fix them on his dimly outlined face and read his expression. Her tone indicated that her own expression was challenging.

Again Francis hesitated. He was not used to talking to any one about these intimate, inner things; least of all, had he ever supposed that it might be possible to talk thus to a girl whom he had barely met. A certain reserve stirred in him and made a tentative motion as if to seal his lips. But Eleanor defeated that mood.

"Please!" she said earnestly; and the one word served to give him an unpremeditated reason for speech. Since



she was not merely interested, but really needed to know, he had to try to tell her.

"Why," he explained, still speaking slowly, because he had to choose his words, "it's a sort of symbol to me of all I want to find and do, of all I love. It's very high, and it means climbing, and it's quite beyond my reach. But it's there; I can look at it again and again. And I can always keep on going in its direction."

The explanation was crude and imperfect enough, but the girl knew how to deal with it. Youth gets accustomed to groping and glimpsing.

"I see," she said. "Thank you again. Thank you very much."

She pondered so long this time that he thought she was not going to say anything more, and he was both sorry and relieved. He left the conversational ball in her hands, and mutely waited on her mood, wondering and watching. She was the prettiest girl he had ever seen, and she had apparently left the Club House and come out on purpose to talk with him. He was glad that he no longer had to give the setting moon his whole attention.

"Why don't you ever come in and talk and play games with us?" she recommenced after awhile. "Are you too busy? Or don't you like us?"

Oddly enough, he was not so embarrassed by this personal question as he had been by her first challenge. He was growing a little used to her, and the long silence in the cool, vibrant starlight had restored his confidence.

"Yes, of course I like you," he replied. "But—well, I suppose I'm shy," he said, simply and candidly.

"I've never had much to do with girls. I'm not the kind they like."

"Oh, yes, you are!" she surprised him by saying in an impulsive breath. "Aren't you stupid! You don't know anything about it."

"You—you——" He laughed because she was laughing, but he really felt quite touched and serious. "You like me?" he brought out at last on a note of thrilled inquiry.

"Surely!" she answered gaily. "Would I have come out here if I didn't?"


"I thought you came to see what I was looking at," he reminded her.

"Well"—she shifted her position and reclasped her hands about her knees, as if she found it her turn to hunt words for a vague idea—"that comes to the same thing. I like you because you're so different from other boys. You set me wondering. I want to know what you're thinking about, what you're planning to do. You always seem to me to know something that I'd like to know. Two or three times before this I've been on the point of saying, 'For heaven's sake, speak out and tell me! Don't keep it all to yourself.'"

"Really?"

He was startled and sobered. He gazed at the blur of her face, wishing that he could read her hidden eyes.

"Certainly!" she continued. "Don't you know that some girls, most girls, get tired to death of the silly nonsense boys talk to them? But there seems to be nothing to do about it. That's the way boys are made. Then when somebody with some sense comes along, he



won't have anything to do with us. It's very unfortunate."

"But—but"—Francis stammered again—not because he was embarrassed this time, but because he was surprised—"but I didn't know it would interest you," he brought out deprecatingly.

Eleanor made an impatient gesture. Even in the darkness Francis thought he caught a flash from her eyes.

"That's just the way!" she cried. "All the nonsense is thrown to the girls, and everything that matters is supposed not to interest them."

"Forgive me." His voice was full of conciliation. "It wasn't because I thought that you wouldn't care, but because——"

"You thought nothing at all about it," she broke in. "That's just as bad. Well, I tell you now flatly that I do care, and that it's your moral duty to share your discoveries with me."

"I wish I knew how."

He spoke thoughtfully, yet with an eagerness that made his voice throb. He had never found anything so exciting as this brand new challenge.

"You've done it already." She glanced up at the dark crest of the mountain above them. "I shall never forget about the Grail. You've given me lots to think about—oh, just lots!"

"And you've given me lots, too," he told her warmly. "It had never occurred to me that I had anything really worth sharing with other people—anything, I mean, that they didn't already have. I like sharing."

He beamed at her.

"That's good." She smiled back at him through the starlight. "I guess we're going to be friends."

"Where do you live?" he asked her presently, when another session of dewy silence had passed over them.

"In Bridgehaven," she replied.

"Not really?" He laughed delightedly. "Bridgehaven, where the college is? Why, that's my home."

"Honestly?" She shared his astonishment. "And we've never met. Are you—oh! yes, of course, you *are* Professor Merwin's son!"

There was a whole volume of suddenly enlightened interest in her tone. She tried harder than ever to scrutinise him through the darkness.

"You know my father?"

He was not sure just what her tone implied, so his own was doubtful.

"Yes, and admire him immensely. He has told me lots about you, and I've always wanted to meet you. Dear me! to think this is you!"

She continued to stare at him. Then she laughed softly to herself, with a pleased little chuckle.

"Father hasn't always very much use for me," Francis suggested, feeling his way. "I'm so useless socially."

"He's awfully fond of you," Eleanor stated emphatically. "Of course I suppose he wishes you cared more about dances and girls and things. But that's just because he is fond of you."

"Are you to be there next winter?" Francis asked, changing the subject. "I'm going to enter the college."

"I'm going to college myself," she replied. "To Smith. So I shall only be home for vacations."

"May I come to see you then?"

"Please do," she answered.

The strange little conversation seemed ended. Neither young person found anything more to say. Yet they lingered still a few minutes, enjoying the tender beauty of the night and revolving the revelations which they had suggested, each one to the other. Perhaps they felt that silence could cement their new friendship better than anything else. Francis was the last to speak, finding one thing more to say, after all—a thing that was the firstfruit of the new conception of life which Eleanor had suggested to him. His voice was shy and apologetic, yet full of eagerness.

"Meantime, don't let's forget the Grail," he said.

Eleanor looked slowly up at him. They had risen and stood together under the clear starlight. She nodded gravely and turned away, just as a band of boys and girls came laughing down the hill to find her.

True to his old instinct, Francis jumped across the brook and disappeared in the shadows.

II

PEOPLE who loved analysis (as who in a college town does not?) never got tired of wondering what could have induced Professor Vincent Merwin and his wife to marry each other. If she had been less dreadfully pious, the case might have been clear enough from her side; for certainly a handsomer, more charming man than he did not exist. But an utter agnostic, at times even a tentative atheist: how could she have linked her fate with his? Probably she had thought she could convert him, never dreaming, poor woman, that her particular brand of virtue was the very thing to drive him as far as possible in the other direction. One pitied her sometimes, when one could divert one's mind from pitying Vincent.

But it is fatally easier to pity the world and the comely flesh than to pity Bildad the Shuhite; and Jane Merwin had few sympathisers compared with her husband. She was very plain—tall and angular, of the strictest New England type; and even her abundant hair was brushed and braided as tight as possible. Her large eyes were prominent, and her thin lips were very much in earnest. Her clothes had a stalwart, deliberate look, as if they were worn for protection rather than for adornment. Her chief business in life was not to neglect her duties.

"If one could suspect her of having caught him," laughed Professor Henderson's wife, "one could hope to understand the matter. I believe they met abroad, when he was rather forlornly recovering from an illness. But it's impossible to imagine her having departed one step from feminine standards of modesty. He must even have had to work hard to win her."

Perhaps that was it. Vincent Merwin was always wilful and rather easily bored. The siege of the inflexible young woman may have amused him by giving him something to do; and when he had succeeded, his good sportsman's sense of humour may have enabled him to stand by his bargain gracefully.

"After all," said Mrs. Henderson reflectively, "it's not unlike Vincent to stake his whole life on a reckless whim."

Francis was the only child of this marriage. He was born within a year, under the shadow of Amiens cathedral. His father had insisted on this unconventional birthplace, because it held, on the whole, the most excellent beauty available. His wife had demurred and protested; she would have preferred a Paris hospital. But once in a while Vincent Merwin made up his mind; and when he did so, he always had his way.

"It's all nonsense, Jane," he said kindly. "There's a first rate doctor in Amiens. I've made careful inquiries. You'll get well faster in a quiet place. Trust me; I know what I'm doing."

In later years Francis's very longing to remember those natal days wrought in him a half conviction that

he did remember them. The bells were ringing for early Mass when he opened his eyes on the world, and the pealing summons was therefore the first sound his ears received. In the afternoon of that same day his father, taking advantage of the facts that Jane was asleep and that the nurse had gone out for a walk, bundled his son in a blanket and carried him across the street into the cathedral.

"See, sonny," he said, as he lifted the limp, blind little mite up beneath the solemn arches. "Look at those windows; look at those pillars. And don't you ever forget them."

A young priest came down the aisle as Vincent stood thus; and, glancing at the baby, paused.

"You have brought him for baptism?" he inquired, hesitatingly.

"No," said Vincent at once. "But, wait!" he added almost as immediately.

It was not at all of the institution of the Roman Catholic Church that he was thinking as he stood hesitating, pondering the new idea. It was of beauty, sheer beauty, the thing that he most loved and desired. He had chosen his son's birthplace that the child might be born into beauty, and he had thus early smuggled him into the cathedral that he might as soon as possible be formally introduced to it. Would not the baptism be a sort of symbolic assurance that the baby had been received into the service of loveliness? The notion pleased his imagination; and, with a smiling nod, he handed his bundle over to the priest.

The question of the name took him aback for a second.

Jane and he had come to no previous agreement. But directly beside him, where he stood in the baptismal chapel, was a statue of Saint Francis, and he mutely pointed to it. The young priest was pleased.

"I shall pray that he may be as beautiful as that dear saint," he said, smilingly, as, after due registration, he handed back the new Catholic.

It goes without saying that Vincent never told his wife about this episode. He had already discovered her abhorrence of the Roman Church, and he saw that the aversion grew upon her during her sojourn in Amiens. It was only her conscientious determination to make a good recovery and to give her baby a quiet start in life that kept her there six weeks.

But father and son made the most of their time. There was not a day when they did not enter the glorious old church and wander about the shadowy aisles, underneath the glowing windows. Vincent held Francis's little face close to exquisite traceries, where, if his baby eyes saw anything, they must see grace and symmetry. He uncurled his baby fingers, and laid them about many a carven flower. Often and often the two of them heard Mass or Vespers or Benediction, lingering in the shadows a little apart from the throng of worshippers. Once or twice the young priest who had baptised Francis passed them and, smiling, said, "That's right. Give him a good Catholic start." Whereupon, Vincent shook his head and laughed, savouring a subtle and manifold amusement.

As soon as the little family returned to Paris, Jane

asked the pastor of the American Church to baptise her son.

"I'd like to call him Samuel, after my father," she explained to Vincent.

It was an anticipated crisis, and the young father roused himself to meet it with adroitness and despatch. He had not one sound argument to advance in favour of the name which the baby already bore, but he let loose a plausible flood of sentiments and suggestions which quite bewildered his poor wife. In the end he fell back on the autocratic method which, a couple of months before, had carried them to Amiens.

"I'm sorry, my dear; but, really, I've called him Francis so long (you know I began it the day he was born) that I can't possibly stop now. You may have him baptised Samuel if you choose, but I shall have to go on calling him Francis."

As a fact, his second baptism conferred upon him the double name, Samuel Francis; but his father's persistency saw to it that he was never called anything but Francis.

He lived abroad for four years, and had some pretty definite impressions of Italian cypresses, Greek columns, and Sicilian olive orchards to take home with him. His baby response to beauty was all that his father had desired. The southern churches were not so impressive as the northern Gothic structures, and therefore his Catholic training lapsed after the first few weeks. But, in due time, his mother saw to it that he was well grounded in Protestant theology; and he came to have a polite understanding of God and the angels. He said

his prayers night and morning; and, as soon as he could manage the words, he learned the Ten Commandments.

Both parents were proud of their son. He had his father's beauty and charm and his mother's conscience. But both were uneasy on that account. "Oh, come, son, forget it! Never mind if it is time to go home!" Vincent would cry, when, at the punctual end of some blissful half hour in a Roman garden, the boy, mindful of maternal instructions, would wake from a wide-eyed reverie and clamber down from his bench. And, "Frank, that lady didn't mean anything when she called you a cherub," Jane would explain after a rapturous effusion from some passer-by. "It was only her way of hoping you were a good little boy."

He had a narrow escape from being an infant prodigy and a desperate little prig. Probably it was only his native humility and a certain bubbling sense of humour that saved him. But a miss is always as good as a mile; and, though other children sometimes began by regarding him with suspicion, they never failed to be on the best terms with him after an hour or two. He was shy, but he dearly loved a good time; and his confidence was easily won.

Vincent's profession was that of a teacher of history. He rose rapidly in it, winning scholastic honours abroad, and coming home to accept a chair in one of the big American universities. His specialty was the Renaissance. He taught that brilliantly.

Brilliancy was, in fact, the word that best described him in all his functions, intellectual and social. He was quite the star of the faculty circle, constantly in demand.

At first his wife handicapped him somewhat. Dinner was the form of entertainment most affected by his friends; it was the form in which he himself particularly delighted. But the success of a dinner depends on the harmony of the guests; and two or three times it happened that Jane's severe, high-collared presence was enough to cast a blight over everything. Vincent had a social conscience. He considered the problem gravely, and came to a resolution which cost him no little effort of self-sacrifice. The next time he and his wife were invited out to dinner he found that he had another engagement. But when he told Jane of the nature of the note he wanted her to write to their would-be hostess, she sat still and looked at him fixedly for a moment.

"You've no other engagement, Vincent," she said uncompromisingly. "But I have. That's prayer-meeting evening. I very much wish you'd go to the dinner without me."

After some slight hesitation, he sat down and wrote one of his graceful, inimitable notes, throwing himself on his hostess's mercy to pardon his unconventionality, begging that, since his wife could not come, he might be permitted to come alone. And, the wedge being entered, it was not long before the faculty circle understood, to its immeasurable relief, that it need no longer wrestle with the problem of entertaining Mrs. Merwin.

Jane was very busy. She honestly had little or no time for social functions. On moving to Bridgehaven, she had brought her church letter from the little Vermont town of her birth, and had become a member of the First Congregational Church—an active member.

She taught a large class in Sunday-school, she was Secretary of the Ladies' Missionary Society, she worked on almost every committee that was ever formed, and no morning service or evening prayer-meeting was complete without her.

Her efforts to induce her husband to come to church with her were pathetically unavailing. His very politeness of indifference baffled her.

"Vincent, there's to be a fine preacher this morning, one of the Union professors. Don't you want to come and hear him? They say he's very advanced."

Advanced! Poor Jane! She herself was dreading that sermon, and she had quite made up her mind that Francis must not be allowed to hear it; but she dangled it as a bait for her husband, and was cast down when a look of amusement flashed over his face and he said:

"Thank you, my dear; but I've got some advancing of my own to do on a paper for the Metaphysical Society."

He was considerate, as well as clever, enough to avoid all discussions with her; and it was only indirectly, from scandalised ladies of her church, that she knew to what lengths of utter incredulity his agnosticism went. She was grieved and appalled then, but she had not the least idea what to do about it.

Francis grew up rather bewildered by the atmospheric discrepancies of his home. He went to church with his mother because that was what he was expected to do. He went to Sunday-school, and in time he became a member of the Christian Endeavour Society. He learned his catechism and the Twenty-third Psalm and

the Thirteenth Chapter of First Corinthians. On Sunday afternoons, when his father did not take him for a walk, he read "Pilgrim's Progress." But the key to the beauty of these immortal productions had not yet found its way to him.

When his father did take him for a walk, however, it seemed to him better than anything else in the world to wander through woods and fields and look for beautiful things. Going to church and Sunday-school yielded a certain solid satisfaction of having done one's duty and got it over with; but there was nothing lovely about it—that wasn't the idea. Whereas, walking with father was living, was ecstasy. Francis loved his mother dutifully; but he idolised his father. Never was there such a companion for a sensitive little boy—so droll, so merry, so sympathetic, so rich in ideas. He seemed to know by instinct just where the prettiest flowers grew and where the birds nested. He understood at precisely what point to turn in a ramble and catch a fair view suddenly unrolling behind them. His silences were as satisfactory as his words. On entering a wood he could always be trusted to stop and stand quite still, saying nothing, his hand closing a little more tightly about that of his son.

It was too bad that mother couldn't come with them. She tried once; but her shoe-strings came untied, and she tore her skirt on a bramble, and she was afraid to cross the brook, and—no, the truth was that they none of them had a good time that day. It was mother for church and duty, and father for the woods and pleasure.

Yet it was mother who, by taking them up to her old

Vermont home one summer vacation, introduced them to the loveliest place they had ever seen. She had wanted to do this before, but father had never been willing to let her; he had always said he was sure he wouldn't like it. Well, father had been mistaken; he confessed as much himself.

"By Jove, Jane! I beg your pardon. The joke is on me."

It was only a little valley, lying between softly moulded, shadowy hills, with woods on the heights and meadows in the lowland and brooks everywhere; but there was a magic about it. From the instant Francis saw it, it laid a spell of mystery upon him. Summer after summer he came back—with his parents, of course, though once or twice his father went abroad alone; and every year he grew in knowledge of the beauty that claimed him so passionately. It was his chief, at times his only, concern. Books and people were interesting only as they ministered to it.

At first it was all very vague, diffused through the whole earth and sky. He could sometimes best apprehend it by looking so long at a light-hung mountain that he ceased to see it with his physical eye and seemed to enter into communion with the soul of it. One of his most rapturous experiments was to lie on a bare hill and close his eyes and feel himself sweeping through space, among the stars. But his father's son could not long be content with nebulous mental processes; and, by the time he was sixteen, he was seeking and striving to define the nature of his interest. By the time he was eighteen, when his friendship with Eleanor Ramsey

began, he had learned the value of symbol in clutching at the skirts of the ineffable and subduing it to working purposes. The Light, the Grail: into these definite words and conceptions he crowded all the vastness that was too much for him. He went out to see the moon set behind West Mountain as if it were a real revelation of that which he loved.

Until he met Eleanor, he said nothing of these matters to any one. His mother, of course, was out of the question as a confidante; and he was disappointed to find that his father was almost equally so. Yet, strangely enough, for all his regret, he was not surprised at the latter failure. Obscurely, almost unconsciously, he had anticipated it, and had instinctively delayed putting it to the test. Again and again, in the moonlit meadows, or in the hushed heart of the evening woods, or on some silent mountain peak, he had been on the point of lifting the veil of his heart to his father, and had drawn back, waited—not this time! It was hardly a hint that he had dropped at last, the merest tentative motion; but it had sufficed, the veil had never stirred again.

"All a bluff, son!" his father had answered. "There's nothing there, really, but rocks and trees and obscurity. One has to be on one's guard against all tricks of the imagination. Otherwise, one gets into all sorts of sentimental messes. Beauty is the best thing in the world, and the most dangerous."

It was curious how he knew at once that his father was wrong, how instantly he shed and ignored the warning. Sentimentality was as obnoxious to him as to any

other healthy boy; but there was no sentimentality in the woods, absolutely none. On this conviction he took his stand with the most solid assurance he had ever felt. Never mind if, so far as he knew, no one shared it with him.

After this, he and his father went, in their usual fashion, hand in hand, up to a certain point. But, beyond that point, Francis went alone, giving no hint of his independent departure, keeping his discoveries quite to himself. It was all right. Their relation continued one of love and confidence.

III

FATHER," said Francis, coming into Vincent's study one afternoon in the Christmas vacation of his Freshman year, "you know the Ramseys, don't you?"

Vincent looked up from the novel with which he was enjoying the leisure of his holidays, and answered:

"Frederick Ramsey? Yes, of course. What about him?"

"That's what I wanted to know," Francis replied, blushing a little and coming further into the room. "What sort of a man—what sort of people are they, anyway?"

Vincent laid his book aside on the edge of his fine old mahogany desk and regarded his son with thoughtful, smiling eyes.

"I declare," he exclaimed, "if you were any other boy in the world, I should think you had got wind of the fact that Ramsey is the father of the prettiest girl in town!"

Francis blushed outright at this, and laughed in frank confusion.

"Perhaps I have," he confessed. "I met her in Vermont last summer."

"Francis!" His father shook his head. "I don't altogether like to have to suspect you of being deep. You!

Eleanor Ramsey! Last summer! Why have you never told me?"

"Oh, come now, father!" Francis perched on an edge of the desk and swung one foot, caressing a charming Greek figurine with idle but sensitive fingers. "It's nothing to be so emphatic about. I didn't tell you because she wasn't here. But she's home for the holidays now, and I'm going to see her. I——"

"Want me to tell you how to behave?" broke in Vincent laughingly; and was instantly sorry, for Francis frowned a little.

"No, not exactly," the boy replied mildly, as if unaware of his own transient protest. "I guess I can manage that all right enough. But I want to know whether I've got to go in the evening and wear my best togs, or whether I can drop in this afternoon, just as I am, and ask her to go for a walk."

"Well"—Vincent redeemed his indiscretion by taking sober thought of the issue, meeting it respectfully—"conventionality has its uses, but it has also its stupid defects. It doesn't strike me as suiting you in the very least. If I were in your place, I'd run right along and take her for a walk."

"Good!" said Francis, sliding from the desk and gently replacing the figurine. "That's of course what I wanted to do; but I was afraid they might be formal folks."

"Did Eleanor strike you as formal?"

His father looked up with a sudden quirk of his eyebrow, and the boy, remembering his one encounter with the girl, laughed a sympathetic, "No, indeed!"

"She's by far the nicest and most interesting girl in town," Vincent addressed his son's retreating back.

Left alone, the father continued to neglect his novel for several minutes; and his study, responsive to his moods, deepened its atmosphere of consideration. The shelves of books lining the walls leaned closer, as if to lend him all their wisdom and humour; the wood fire in the Franklin stove glowed sympathetically. A large Persian cat on the couch stirred and rose and, yawning, came to rub against his leg. Even the few fine pictures on the walls seemed to be aware that something of importance had transpired. Vincent Merwin's room was thoroughly himself.

But its subtle intelligence did not satisfy him to-day; he wanted some human response. So, by and by, smiling and shaking his head, he went in search of his wife. He knew that she would not understand; but, anyway, he must tell her.

He found her in a room which was as entirely hers as the study was his. She used it for sewing, for writing her missionary reports, for preparing her Sunday-school lessons. A green crex carpet covered the floor, and stiff white sash curtains concealed the lower panes of the windows, while the upper halves went unsoftened. Against the wall on one side stood a roll-top desk of maple; and, directly opposite it, stood a sewing machine. The pictures—of which there were many—were religious and patriotic. A gaunt Abraham Lincoln faced a young woman, with flowing hair, clinging to a rock in the midst of a stormy sea. An adjustable bookcase with glass doors contained some sad-coloured volumes.

When her husband knocked at the door, Jane was seated before her desk, making up the accounts of the day before. She had just remembered another car-fare which had been unrecorded, and, adding it to the sum in her book, had found that it made the balance true. There was, therefore, a certain note of satisfaction in her voice as she turned and said, "Come in."

She had probably expected the cook to consult her about the dessert for dinner; for she started when she saw her husband.

"Why, Vincent!" she began. "Why, I thought that Francis was with you."

The inference was rather pathetic, but it was perhaps too subtle for her consciousness.

"He was," her husband replied, as he entered the room and stood by the window where he could look out over the bright winter world—he never looked at anything in Jane's room if he could help it—"but only for a few minutes. He has other fish to fry to-day. Jane,"—his voice rippled with amusement—"he has gone to take Eleanor Ramsey for a walk."

Jane remained silent. As so often happened with her, she did not know how to take her husband. He was evidently amused and surprised at something, but just what and why?

"They're nice people, aren't they?" she ventured at length, speaking with complex anxiety—concerned for her son, concerned for herself in relation to her husband's mood. "Seems to me, though, I've heard that they're Unitarians," she added.

Vincent sighed. He thrust his hands in his trousers

pockets and slightly shrugged his shoulders. Then, presently, without saying anything further, he turned and left the room. His wife looked after him, her eyes clouded with an all too familiar recognition of failure. Then she also sighed and returned to her account book. At least, she had succeeded in tracking down that five cents.

Meantime, out in the winter world, Francis was walking rapidly along the streets that lay between his house and Eleanor's. His heart was light; and, now and then, he whistled softly under his breath. The brilliant beauty of the day, combined with the exciting novelty of his errand, stirred him to an unwonted pitch of eagerness. He had, literally, never before in his life gone to call on a girl. But that was not the point. The point was that he had never before faced the thrilling prospect of an intimate talk with any one. Would he be disappointed? He tried to forewarn himself that he might find a different kind of person from the girl who had surprised and challenged him by the Vermont brook, to whom he had so unexpectedly opened his heart. Environment works wonders, he knew; and he had instinctively thought of that girl as an emanation of the evening shadows. Could she possibly seem the same in a conventional, urban street, under the clear, hard light of a snowy afternoon? It was with some real trepidation that he waited in the little reception room while the maid went upstairs to report his presence.

Just for a minute, when Eleanor first entered the room and held out her hand, he thought that his fears were realised and his heart sank. Her dress and her

manner were so exactly like those of any other girl! But she read his dismay in his candid eyes, and instantly her own eyes welled with friendly amusement.

"Surely you didn't expect me to greet you in poetry?" she laughed. "Or to wear white shoes and a sweater?"

He laughed too, and blushed with his frank, boyish confusion.

"Of course not! I'm stupid," he answered her. "Won't you come for a walk?"

"I'd love to."

She did not even sit down, but turned and went back upstairs more quickly than she had come down.

"I'll be ready in two minutes," she called over her shoulder.

She kept her word so well that he had only time to notice that the principal object in the big living-room which opened out of the room where he waited, was a grand piano, and that a great case of bound volumes of music stood beside it.

"You play?" he asked eagerly, when she once more stood beside him, drawing on her gloves.

"Yes," she assented. "Next time you come, I'll play for you. Beethoven!" she added after a brief pause for consideration.

Out in the street, his shyness made an attempt to reconquer him. Either he or his companion knew almost everybody they met, and he was constantly parrying significant glances of surprise or admiration. Eleanor took these encounters with the conventional ease which he dreaded in her; and he was relieved when

they came to the end of a long street and struck out into the country.

"Now!" he said involuntarily; and again her eyes flashed laughter at him.

"How you do hate 'the usual thing'!" she commented, settling down into a somewhat slower pace, as if she had gained a sort of goal and could afford to take her time. "Well, I don't care for it either but I guess I'm more used to it than you are, and know how to ignore it. It's really harmless enough. Sometimes it doesn't mean anything at all."

"That's the trouble: it's stupid," he answered her. "But never mind now. Let's talk. There's such lots to be said."

Her glance agreed with him perfectly; but, nevertheless, they both kept silence for several minutes. Their young, instinctive wisdom instructed them that that was the best and quickest way to begin a conversation. From time to time they took note of each other out of the corners of their eyes, reinforcing their last twilight memories. She seemed to him prettier than ever in her grey walking suit, with her grey hat resting upon the cloud of her soft dark hair, and with her grey-blue eyes looking out from beneath her dark eyebrows. Her colour was clear and glowing, and her firm and thoughtful lips were smiling slightly. She, on her side, found him equally good to look upon, with his fair hair tumbled beneath his cap and his eyes bright with a certain blue fire that was apt to burn in them. He stood up very tall and straight, and walked buoyantly.

"Well," she said at last, breaking the silence which

he was beginning to find so good that, for all his eagerness to talk, he might have let it linger, "how have the weeks treated you? How do you like college?"

"Fine!" he answered her, emerging from his companionable reverie. "Don't you?"

"Yes."

She acquiesced, but evidently with reservations.

"What's the matter?"

He challenged her tone; and, after a moment, she answered:

"Well, it's awfully jolly, and I like the work, and we certainly have good times. But it's not much like real life, after all—just a lot of girls in together. I miss the older people and the men and boys.

"You see," she added, when he said nothing, "my mother died when I was a little girl, and I've had to grow up rather fast. I've grown used to the world at large, and I like it."

"Do you?"

Her words had set him pondering.

"Don't you?" she inquired.

"I suppose I don't understand it," he answered, turning a thoughtful, rather troubled gaze on her. "I'd like to, I try to; but—— I like this!" he stated, breaking off and flinging his arm out toward the soft grey winter hills and the snowy meadows. "This is the world, too, of course. I like this fine."

"And college?"

She knit her brows over him as if he puzzled her.

"Oh! college is different from anything else. We're reading the Odyssey this year, and beginning Early

English, and my father has a stunning course in the Italian Renaissance."

"And the boys?"

"They're good chaps. I see quite a lot of some eight or ten of them."

"People like you, anyway, don't they?" she mused, with her eyes still studying him. "That is, when you give them a chance," she added humorously.

But something in his expression of unenlightenment and tentative embarrassment made her move on to another, less personal turn of the conversation.

"How about the Grail?" she asked softly, and brought him at once to a standstill.

"You haven't forgotten!"

His tone caressed her unconsciously, and so did his eyes, dwelling on her face.

"Why, no, of course not!" she reproached him. "What do you mean? How could I forget? Wasn't that the whole point of our friendship?"

"Yes," he sighed happily, beginning to walk again. "But I was afraid—I couldn't believe—nobody else cares about it," he ended not very coherently.

"Perhaps you've never told them," she suggested, once more drawing her brows together over him. "Have you tried?" she challenged him after a moment, as he made no reply.

He continued to muse for a moment longer; then he turned and looked at her humbly, yet with no apparent conviction of sin.

"No," he admitted. "I don't know how. You're the

only person. And you knew already. I don't see how I could tell any one who didn't already know."

"You're mistaken. I didn't know," she assured him earnestly. "I had never thought of such a thing; and it made—I can't tell you what a difference it made. I've been thinking about it ever since, getting my own little wagon into shape for hitching. Do you know"—she paused and met his eyes gravely—"it's none of my business, but I think it's your duty to tell people about these things."


A curious mixture of feelings stirred him, as he looked back into her serious face. There was the thrill of excitement which he had felt as she had responded to him by the Vermont brook; but there was also a protest, a faint echo of Jeremiah's "Ah, Lord Jehovah! behold I know not how to speak; for I am a child." It seemed to him that he would rather do anything else in the world than tell, say, his father and his classmate, Jerry McBride, about the Grail. On the other hand, he could go on forever telling Eleanor.

"Don't you like it?" she challenged him once more after a few thoughtful minutes. "Why, I should think you'd just love to have something so definite and important to do."

Her eyes were both summoning and wistful.

"It isn't definite," he demurred, finding a point on which to ease his heart of its mysterious burden. "That's the trouble. What could I say? 'Hey, you fellows! there's a light on the mountain, a light that never was on sea or land. Mind you follow it!'"

Eleanor laughed, but she shook her head.




"That was enough for me," she insisted. "Most people really have the light in their hearts all the time; but they don't know it, they have to have their attention called to it. I think it's wonderful to be able to call people's attention."

Francis sighed—he had not the least idea why—and changed the subject by coming to a pause on the crest of the little hill which they had been climbing. The early winter sun was setting behind a range of low hills in the distance, and its ruddy light was streaming back across the snowy fields, casting long, delicate shadows of bare trees. The air was still and crystal clear. The blue sky above them lay without a cloud.

Eleanor said nothing. She stood with her hands thrust deep in her big black muff and her eyes looking straight into the golden west. Her poise was as light and assured as that of a tree. But Francis did not glance at her. He was watching the setting of the sun, and the brief shade of trouble was fading from his face. When the quivering, glittering rim had quite withdrawn behind the horizon, he drew a long breath that was not a sigh, and turned a pair of quiet eyes back on his companion.

"Well, anyway, I can't do anything till the time comes," he remarked rather inexplicably. "Any more than the sun can," he added. "Or the stars"—pointing to Venus, beginning to tremble whitely in the pulsing sunset gold. "That's a comfort. I guess I won't think any more about it now."

On the way home they talked fragmentarily of the interests common to their college boy-and-girlhood.



They compared notes about their teachers and textbooks, about the routine of their lives, about their companions. Occasionally they spoke of their Bridgehaven homes and their families. Francis discovered that Eleanor's family consisted only of a father, whom she dearly loved.

"That's one reason why I'm restless at college. Aunt Lilius is keeping house for father this year. But I can't believe that any one knows how to take care of him quite so well as I."

She laughed.

"Honestly, I think I'll stay home next year," she added soberly.

"Oh! I hope so!" Francis surprised himself by exclaiming fervently.

"I hope so, too," she responded with a friendly glance.

Even to Francis's inexperienced, unworldly eyes, it had been apparent, from the general look of the Ramsey house and of Eleanor's clothes, that money ran rather more freely here than in the Merwin establishment; and now little things that she said made him sure that her father was a rich man. He seemed to have something to do with the big factories down by the railroad station.

"I know lots of faculty people; but I know lots of others, too," Eleanor said. "You don't mind my saying that I'd suffocate if I didn't?"

Francis laughed and shook his head.

"But I like the faculty people best," she added promptly and genuinely. "Next to my own father, I

like your father better than any man I have ever known."

"Do you ever go to the college chapel?" he asked her presently, because he happened to think that to-morrow would be Sunday, and he wondered if he should see her.

She shook her head carelessly.

"We're Unitarians," she explained. "But we really don't go to church at all.

"Do you go?" she asked him, suddenly remembering what she had heard of his mother, and turning to look at him.

He hesitated. He did not want to make his statement seem to mean more than it really did.

Then: "Yes, I go to the chapel," he answered. "I used to go with my mother to the Congregational Church; but, now that I'm in college, it seems natural to go with the other fellows. I—I—it doesn't seem to mean much to me," he stated ruefully.

"Of course not."

She brushed the subject aside, as irrelevant. He need not have been to such pains to express his indifference.

"But when may I see you again?" he made bold to say roundly, when they stood at the steps of her house.

She looked down at him thoughtfully.

"I'm going out to dinner to-night," she replied. "And, on Monday, we're going away to spend the rest of the holidays with my grandmother. There's to-morrow afternoon. Suppose you come and let me play Beethoven to you."

"Thank you, I will," he answered, with more of his heart in his voice than he suspected.

IV

THE next day was stormy. A fine snow began to fall early in the morning and by noon it was blowing and drifting in a bewildering fashion. Francis and his mother went to church together, since, after all, as he, in his eagerness yesterday, had forgotten, the college chapel was closed for the holidays. Vincent laughed at them amiably.

“Good heavens! On such a day! You’ll ruin your hat and catch cold, Jane. Don’t you think that will be immoral?”

Jane reddened. She could never get accustomed to her husband’s casual use of discountenanced words.

Francis was glad to go with her, because he wanted something to do to beguile the hours until afternoon. He had wakened in a dreamy, yet restless mood, haunted by forgotten visions of the night, lured on by something which he could not define. It seemed to him possible that he might find what he wanted in church. But when, because of the ugliness of the structure and the barrenness of the service, he remained disappointed, he was not surprised. After all, whatever there might or might not be in his desire, the demand for beauty was unmistakable; and churches do not minister to that. He glanced at his mother, sitting beside him, erect and motionless, with her eyes fixed on the preacher, and

wondered just what the businesslike order of exercises meant to her. Something, evidently—even much; for her whole being was at attention. But the act seemed deliberate with her; she was not swept into it. During the prayers she leaned forward slightly and closed her eyes. Francis instinctively slipped to his knees; but presently scrambled up again as unobtrusively as possible. This was the climax of his disappointment. He had wanted to be kept on his knees.

After dinner he went into his father's study, and spent an hour poring over some European photographs. Vincent came and looked over his shoulder, sharing his enjoyment.

"Too bad that they've lost the trick of doing that sort of thing!" he mused, contemplating the solemn nave of York Minster.

"Why have they lost it?" Francis propounded. "Surely it stands for something besides a phase, something that endures."

His father shook his head.

"Nothing endures, son," he answered; "nothing. Life is all flux and change."

At four o'clock Francis decided that the face of his watch, often scrutinised, was at last in a satisfactory condition and, putting it back in his pocket with an air of finality, he rose from his chair.

"Off again?" smiled his father. "Well," as the boy made no immediate reply, "ask her to play the Tschai-kowsky andante for you. She'll know which one you mean."

Out in the storm, Francis thrust his hands deep in

his pockets and walked rapidly. Instead of bending his head to avoid the whirling white multitudes of the snowflakes, he lifted his face that he might feel them smite him on cheek and brow. He was suddenly very glad to be out, and wished he had come before. In the morning he had been so preoccupied in guiding his mother's steps and trying to hold an umbrella over her that he had shared her view of the storm as an inconvenience. But now he found that it met his mood better than any other experience of the day. It was wild and mysterious, yet full of peace; it let itself go, but it obeyed a rhythmic law. Its swift, blinding silence answered to his hidden, imperative need. He gave himself over to it as completely as it gave itself over to the wind, and he sped before and with it. In the heart of it was a warm, friendly goal toward which he could not make too great speed.

But the heart of a snowstorm is everywhere; and goals sometimes surprise their seekers by coming to meet them. A few blocks from the Ramsey house, Francis was suddenly brought up short by the apparition of two familiar grey eyes, laughing at him from out the white, whirling wonderland.

"Miss Ramsey!"

He pulled off his cap, and the blue fire leaped into his eyes.

"I came to recall my invitation," she said, hastily explanatory and on the defensive. "After all, I can't play Beethoven for you this afternoon."

"You've another engagement?"

He tried to keep the disappointment out of his voice.

"No, of course not!" She steadied herself against a blast of the wind. "But I looked out of the window and saw three people coming to call. So I scurried into my hat and coat, and cut down the back stairs and out the back door. I didn't have time to think. If I had,"—she made a mocking little face, once more on the defensive—"I dare say I shouldn't have come."

But he paid no attention to her disclaimer, and the light in his eyes did not waver. He thanked her silently.

"Shall we walk?" he said, turning and falling into step by her side. "It's a great day, isn't it?"

"Oh! isn't it, just? I've been shut up all the morning, and it's glorious to be out."

Away they went through the storm, careening like sailboats.

They were both of them glad that the snow and the wind prevented them from talking. The anticipation of the afternoon had fostered a mood of silence in them; they were prepared to have somebody else—Beethoven or a snowstorm—do their talking for them. Perhaps they did not yet know each other quite well enough to keep a long silence without some excuse. But they would know each other thus well pretty soon. That realisation was borne in on them both, as they felt their friendship expand and deepen from block to block of their snowy walk. The very obscurity helped them. It gave them a chance to glance at each other from behind sheltering veils. Once or twice, when their eyes met, they smiled; and each time a warmer confidence shone from face to face.

They did not strike out into the open country. The

storm made each street of the town as lonely and free as a mountain top. They could not see ten rods ahead of their feet; and, for the first fifteen or twenty minutes, they met no wayfarers at all. They hardly knew where they were, where they were going; nor did they care. They were quite given over to the white wilderness and to the sense of comradeship in it.

Then suddenly they turned a corner and came in touch with the world again. A great grey church loomed out of the snowy dusk, and lights bloomed like starry flowers, and music pealed. The apparition was so unexpected in their silent, untenanted universe that they were simultaneously arrested by it. They stopped and stood at gaze.

"It's the Roman Catholic church," said Francis. "They're having Vespers or something. Would——"

"Yes, I should," answered Eleanor. "It sounds quite beautiful; and, anyway, I'm cold."

She led the way up the steps.

It was all so sudden, so unforeseen, so utterly undreamed of in their dim white solitude, that, for a moment or two, when they stood inside the door, they were bewildered. The blaze of light and the music overwhelmed their groping senses. Afterwards, Francis reflected that he had never felt himself so caught out of his body as by this very most imperious appeal to it. He could only stand breathless and wondering.

Vespers had led the way, through its sequence of prayers and litanies, through its adoring hymns, to the supreme moment of Benediction. The congregation was on its knees. The crowded pews showed only bent

shoulders and the backs of half hidden heads. The lights on the altar were blazing; the priest, clad in robe on robe, stood before the sacred Host, about to take It in his hands. The crying music was subsiding into a most solemn hush. It was poignantly thrilling to be thus caught out of silence and remoteness into the shining, ringing heart of music and light and then, as swiftly, to be plunged into a new silence. Such a different silence! Hark! what a clear, commanding bell rang through it! The priest turned, holding the monstrance in his veiled hands, and held it before the people, making——

But what happened then Francis did not know; for he, too, was on his knees, with his head bent, his whole being prostrate, adoring, rapt with ecstasy. Never in all his life had such an overwhelming sense of beauty—which is God—flowed over and through him.

He did not stir when the people around him began to lift their heads and when the hymns pealed forth again. He was grateful to the movement and sound for covering him and letting him alone for a few moments. He wanted to take his bearings, to try to understand something of what had happened to him. It was something tremendous—he realised that. It had all but annihilated him. The Light, the Grail—had it come down from its inaccessible mountain and taken definite, concrete shape in his very presence? He could not believe it; yet what but the Grail could thus have mastered him? He wondered at the other people for so soon lifting their heads and giving thanks. For himself, he thought he should never be able to move or speak again.

But, by and by, slowly, the tide of emotion ebbed a little, and he got to his feet and looked about him. The lights on the altar were quenched; the priests were departing, the service was over, the congregation was likewise getting ready to go. Eleanor stood beside him, her face watchful and very grave, with the lingering shadow of what must have been a great astonishment in it. He did not speak to her, even to say, "Shall we go now?" but her mood coincided with his, and together they turned toward the door. In another moment they were out in the snowstorm again.

They had been in the church, perhaps, ten minutes. The snow which they had brought in with them had barely had time to melt. They had not spoken a word to each other. Yet, on resuming their walk, each knew that the world had changed for the other, that a commanding new element had been revealed in it. They did not know at all what it was. For the moment they did not want to know. They were only dimly aware that the great white silence about them had a new voice. In its apparently random whirlings and eddyings, the storm fulfilled an inscrutable purpose which it had at heart. They gave themselves over to it more confidently than ever.

Neither of them so much as thought of saying anything till they stood at Eleanor's steps. Then, "Good-bye," they said gently, and parted with a smile.

IV

IT was natural, even inevitable, that Francis should not speak of this Sunday afternoon's experience to any one. In the first place, he had no words to express it. It was too unfamiliar, too altogether unprecedented. In the second place, he was not at all sure at what conclusion—if any—he should arrive concerning it, and he wanted to hold even his impressions in abeyance. In the third place, to whom could he speak, now that Eleanor was gone? He buckled down to his second term's work with the avidity of one who wants to defer a perplexity and who is, at the same time, aware that the best hope of solving the problem lies in amassing as much general wisdom as possible. More or less unconsciously at first, and later quite deliberately, he referred everything he learned to that Catholic Benediction, scrutinising it in the light of philosophy and poetry and history, thinking that, little by little, he might come to understand it.

Those were great weeks. Francis was fortunate in having some explicit challenge set him thus at the beginning of his college course. It enabled him to use his books and lectures as means to an end, trying them intelligently to see which suited him best. Most young people are cast loose into the welter of systems and methods of thought, the diverse experience of a whole

race, with nothing to guide them, no least idea what may be the ultimate use of their wisdom; and so they snatch vaguely, at random, and lose almost as fast as they gain. It is a serious problem of education, this of the inevitable nescience of youth.

Not during his Freshman year, nor yet during the other three, did Francis answer his question. He had not really expected to. But he caught ever clearer glimpses of its nature and its exactions, and he understood better the workings of his own mind.

Philosophy: that was his natural highroad. History seemed to lead him nowhere, except along a very interesting and eventful path. It crowded his mind with incident, but it proved nothing, explained nothing; it did not even seem to give him the gist of the matter. All these kings and queens and statesmen, these battles and treaties—what did they express of the vital mystery of humanity? The important affair was the thing itself, the manifold human spirit, hid in a thousand disguises, belied and betrayed by its own clumsy actions, fighting its way through failure on failure, refusing perversely to stand committed by its own mistakes, declaring proudly that the utmost it can do or leave undone is a negligible fragment of the reality it is. History fettered this mighty conception with tenuous, partial bonds.

Nor was poetry more adequate—beautiful, beguiling poetry. It gave clearer, more significant glimpses; but still they were only glimpses, they shaped no sort of entirety.

Philosophy alone dared to put aside the confusion of fact and event, and to look deeper, holding its breath in

the presence of life itself. It was humble; it had to be. But it was also fearless. Francis entrusted himself to it with hopeful confidence.

He was destined never to forget a good many days of those young years: the day on which he first learned that the independent existence of matter is open to doubt; the day on which he met his first mystic in the pages of Plotinus; the months of days during which he wrestled with Kant's "Critique." Afterwards, he looked back on those days as headlands from which he saw and plunged into new seas.

Meantime, his outer, everyday life was cheerful and boyish enough. He was too shy and too thoughtful to be a popular favourite in his class; but everybody who knew him liked him, and he was invited to become a member of one of the smaller fraternities. Four or five of his classmates liked him more than a little, and came frequently to his house or welcomed him to their rooms. With them he had those endless discussions in which growing youth delights, which, in fact, it finds essential to its development. Life and death, time and eternity, heaven and hell and purgatory: those were some of their modest themes. By the time he was twenty-one and nearly through his Junior year, he had maturely decided that all things were charming illusions.

Yet how utterly charming they were! With all his denial of substance, he had never for one moment been able to escape from the spell it cast on his imagination. The love of beauty grew in him. It both deepened and widened, expanding like a lusty tree that has found the soil it likes. Sometimes with his father, sometimes

alone, he took long walks through the country about Bridgehaven, waiting on each revelation of the passing seasons. He heard all the music that came his way, and made several trips to New York in search of more. He studied the few pictures in the local art gallery, learning them by heart. Above all, during the summer vacations, he gave himself over to the loveliness of the Vermont valley, his mother's home, steeping himself in sheer contemplation of the purple afternoon shadows, the golden-green lights in the woods, the passion of the moonlit nights, the white peace of the stars. On many and many a tranced occasion his gaze seemed to make him one with that on which he gazed; and he forgot himself in it, and it in himself. Then, later, recovering self-consciousness, he reflected that this sort of experience proved his transcendental philosophy and reconciled it with the apparent inconsistency of his love of the world.

He did not go again to the Catholic church. A number of reasons withheld him, none of them very explicitly formulated, but all of them interweaving into a substantial influence. For one thing, he was at the stage of young thought where he held that a beautiful experience, once had, can never be lost, and is really enough for a lifetime. To solicit repetition is greedily to run the risk of disillusionment. For another thing, his Protestant ancestry and training had inevitably furnished him with a multitude of prejudices against Catholicism. The old system was sentimental and false, it pandered to superstition and dealt in perversions of meanings, it was a blight on religious progress. In re-

membering the transcendent moment of that winter Benediction, he was constantly dragging his mind away from the insistent recollection of certain tawdry sights and stuffy smells which he had not remarked at the time, but which had, nevertheless, made their impression upon him. He supposed that they were a part of all Catholic churches.

Perhaps, however, his best reason for holding aloof from that which he really desired, lay in the need which he felt for fitting himself to deal with it. It might never happen again. Well and good! He had had the experience and would never forget it. But, in case the future might possibly hold another such moment, he wanted to be ready for it. It does all very well, it is excellent, to be smitten into blindness once; but, after that, like Paul, one must go apart and study and ponder until one has steadied and clarified one's vision. A second, similar eclipse would mark one unworthy.

Eleanor Ramsey was true to her prophecy in that she did not return to college after her first year. In fact, she did not quite finish the year. In the early spring her father was called abroad for an indefinite sojourn, and he took his daughter with him. Francis had only a glimpse of his friend when she came back to close the house. She could take no walks with him; but one evening she found time to play to him, and it was from that hour that he dated his thirst for music.

He had never had a chance to hear much music in his short life and, his cup being already full, he had not missed it. But when Eleanor's spirit spoke to him through the spirit of Beethoven, when the passion and

sorrow and triumph of life swept through the two spirits and made the room ring, his own spirit responded so fully that his cup overflowed. He sat very still, with his clasped hands hanging between his knees, and said nothing at all. It was one of the great hours of his life. It was one of his new seas.

Vincent followed his son's progress and watched his development with attentive and, on the whole, approving eyes. He himself had gone far along the philosophical road, and still took occasional excursions thereon. He could understand its allurements, although he had long since decided that its altitude was too high and its atmosphere too rarefied for him. Of the boy's inner questionings he could have no suspicion, for there experience failed him.

But Jane was on the alert for any signs of a religious awakening in her son. For several days after the Catholic Benediction, there was an expression on his face which she recognised without in the least understanding it. It prompted her to call him into her little sitting room one afternoon and say abruptly:

"Francis, don't you think it's time you gave your heart to Jesus?"

Francis started as if he had been struck, and a look of positive dismay sprang into his eyes.

"Why—why—mother, what do you mean?" he stammered helplessly.

"I mean joining the church, of course," she explained, obscurely disturbed by the unconscious appeal in his face. "Making your public confession. You're more than old enough."

"I—why, I don't know; I've never thought." He sought wildly for a chance to escape. "I'm going skating just now."

Then he realised what he had said, and completed his disgrace and confusion by laughing nervously.

"'And another had bought a yoke of oxen, and therefore he could not come,'" Jane quoted impressively. "But at least it's no laughing matter, Frank. You ought to be ashamed."

He was—quite dreadfully. He gratified his mother by avoiding her eye and keeping out of her way for the next few days. She thought he was sorry for what he had said, and would have been at a complete loss to understand that it was what she had said that echoed in his mind and caused his embarrassment. She followed up what she supposed to be her advantage by leaving his Bible open at appropriate chapters when she put his room in order, and by asking him to come to Sunday evening meetings with her.

In the end he gratified her entirely by doing just what she wanted; and the middle of his Sophomore year saw him enrolled as a professed member of the Congregational Church. The step was the most difficult one he had ever taken; it was the only one over which he had serious doubts. To save his life, he could not make the matter seem very important. Again and again he invited it to take hold of his heart and convince it; but his heart remained unsolicited. So then he summoned his mind to the business. After all, his father was constantly telling him that the mind is the manlier organ.

Formulated and organised religion—so he threshed out his problem—may not be very interesting, but at least it stands for some of the highest needs and purposes of man. People who have read and thought (oh, wise Sophomore!) know that God is ineffable; He cannot be held by any creed or prayer. Silence is His best worship and the woods and hills are His worthiest temple. But no one can live on the heights all the time, and many people can never approach them. Therefore, the churches subserve a lower but imperative function. Morality is their platform. They teach virtuous living; and surely that is more important than ever nowadays. It becomes the duty of all earnest folk, intent on a righteous civilisation, to ally themselves with all the forces that work for righteousness. The more so because, without doubt, the churches are losing ground, dwindling in numbers, suffering from indifference.

It was, therefore, with a clear, resolute sense of doing his duty that Francis stood up in his mother's church one Sunday morning and took his brief vows.

It had not occurred to him to suggest that his father witness this ceremony; but he thought of him constantly, and as soon as he returned home he made his way to the study. His mother looked after him. He never knew that she had intended to invite him into her room for a few minutes of prayer.

"Father," he said, standing by the desk.

"Well, Francis."

Vincent looked up and smiled, somewhat whimsically.

"You understand, don't you?"

Vincent searched his son's eyes. There was a gleam


of wistful questioning in his own eyes. But his smile deepened.

"Yes, thank God, I do," he replied at length, rising and putting his arm about Francis's shoulders. "I'm even glad you did it. There's no danger of its making the least difference in the world."

He was quite in earnest, and did not know what to make of the sudden smile of amusement which Francis flashed at him.

As a matter of fact, it did make less difference than Francis had thought it would. His mother had the satisfied air of one who has reached an explicit goal. She no longer searched the Scriptures for him; and he gradually got out of the habit of hurrying past her half-open door. When he went to church and prayer-meeting with her, she accepted his company as a matter of course; but when he had some other engagement, her face did not cloud. She even put up tolerantly with the fact that he had a good many other engagements. Young men must have their interests. He had done that which she wanted of him, he had definitely committed himself, he could now be let alone.

This letting alone was the thing that he thought most admirable in the dealings of modern Christianity. It was so sane and wise. It recognised the fact that modern man is a fully developed, intelligent being, prizing his freedom, capable of service only as he retains his liberty. It recognised also its own limitations, and frankly gave over trying to cope with Sublimity. The church to which Francis belonged gave more and more time and money every year to its local charities: boys'



and girls' clubs, sewing societies, gymnasium classes, mothers' meetings, and the like. The stress was on service rather than on worship. Francis could not understand why such a sensible adaptation to the ideals of the modern world did not meet with a fuller response. People ought to have flowed into the church instead of trickling out of it. He himself—since he could reason thus satisfactorily about the state of affairs and approve of it so sincerely, why did he not serve the church more eagerly? He was just like every one else; he was glad of an excuse to stay away. He decided finally that the age was too mature and thoughtful to care greatly about anything, and that the church's supreme touch of wisdom lay in understanding this fact and making no insistent demand.

Sometimes he submitted these various questions and conclusions to his father, and was gratified to find that, while Vincent found the subject less interesting than his son, he had thought about it and had evolved much the same analysis.

"The church is on its last legs. It understands that, and is meeting the situation with a good deal of dignity and self-respect. As far as it can, it marches abreast with the age, keeping up with the times until it is sure its usefulness is over. Because I respect and even admire the adaptability it has shown, I am glad to have you ally yourself with it. I am especially glad since I see that you take it quite in the spirit in which it offers itself, and don't expect too much of it. I'm relieved about you. You used to be such a dreamer that I was afraid you'd make some absurd mistakes

and get some bad disappointments. But you're coming out all right. You've caught the swing of the times."

His father shot such an affectionate, approving look at him, when he said this, that Francis could not understand why his own satisfaction was not complete. He smiled back responsively, but his heart misgave him. Across his mind flashed the memory of a many-tapered altar and a throng of worshippers, prostrate, adoring. The note of a sanctus bell rang through his ear, and instinctively he bent his head a little.

"Do you know much about the modern Catholic Church?" he ventured carelessly.

"Oh, the Catholic Church!" His father laughed. "Thank heaven, we don't have to concern ourselves with that outworn issue! It's fit for the rubbish heap, but it hasn't the honest intelligence to know it. A man with brains lowers himself by thinking about it."

The result of all these influences—educational, religious, and parental—was that, early in his twenty-third year, Francis graduated from college, outwardly as complete a modern Pagan as his father had desired. He had taken his bearings, squared himself with the twentieth century, and fallen into line with the new tendencies. Only his social shyness and his love of beauty marked him as different from his fellow men. Inwardly, he had many a lurking dissatisfaction, many a stifled wonder; but he made light of these discrepancies and hoped by ignoring them to discourage them out of existence.

When Eleanor Ramsey came back from Europe, he had not so much as thought of the Grail for six months.

VI

HE was glad that she came back in the summer and that their first reunion therefore took place in Vermont. They had seen each other so seldom and had been so long separated that he felt the need of all possible reinforcements in meeting her again. The very memory of his brief intimacy with her embarrassed him. He could not believe that he had once talked so freely and—well, perhaps foolishly to any one. Let there be plenty of space about them when they approached each other now—woods and meadows and mountains among which to take refuge.

Nevertheless, he lost not an hour in seeking her out; and the actual place in which their eyes and hands met was a hotel piazza.

In the three years of her absence, she had become beautiful instead of pretty. Her tall figure had rounded, and held itself nobly; and the glance of her eyes was instinct with that most charming of all things, a girlish maturity. She was young, but she seemed to understand herself and the world. Two or three young men had followed her out on the piazza, but when they saw Francis, like good sportsmen, they stood aside.

"Shan't we go for a walk?" he suggested. "There's no place to talk here."

She nodded, and stepped off the piazza beside him.

He was silent. It had all come so suddenly—her arrival, his hurrying to see her, her prompt appearance at the door, and her equally prompt departure with him, his recognition of her beauty, and her recognition of something which he did not yet understand—that he was bewildered. But, underneath his confusion, his heart kept exultingly congratulating him. She was the same, she was his friend, he felt no reserve with her.

"I'm glad you came at once," she said, as they made their way down the village street and out into the meadows. "I wanted to see you."

She turned and looked at him; and again he saw that she recognised something of which he was unaware, something that brought a shadow into her eyes.

"Well?" he said anxiously, challengingly.

But she shook her head.

"Wait," she replied. "Let's climb the hill."

It was a perfect August day. The mountains were dreaming in a light haze, and the valley was brimming with misty sunlight. The soft sky was tenanted by a few vague clouds, their bases merging in the tender blue. Crickets chirped drowsily, slender brooks made a murmurous lapping, and the wind sighed in the grass. The whole mood of the day was pensive, gentle, full of repose.

"I just can't tell you how good it seems to me to be back," Eleanor said at last, breaking the silence and stopping in a wide meadow to look around at the hills. "Green Peak, West Mountain—they're better than all the Matterhorns in the world."

"But you must have seen many beautiful things," Francis suggested. "I confess I've been rather envying you."

"Yes, I have, of course," she answered slowly. "And I've enjoyed them immensely. But there's nothing like the place you have loved, the place which has taught you."

Francis looked at her curiously.

"How many years have you been in Vermont?" he asked. "I never saw you until the summer we met."

"Only that one season," she answered. "But don't you know how, sometimes, when the conditions are just right, you learn everything at once? I was blind when we came to Vermont that June. When we left in September, I had opened my eyes."

Francis was deeply interested.

"I wish I had known," he murmured.

"I wish you had!" she surprised him by saying fervently. "It seemed incredible to me that you didn't know; for it was you, more than any one or anything else, who taught me."

"Me?" cried Francis, too completely taken aback to be grammatical.

He came to a full stop on the hillside, that he might study her.

They were well above the valley now, in a rolling pasture full of rocks and prairie weed. Beside them a little brook slipped through the bushes, making a musical chatter over its stony bed. Above them, the crest of West Mountain loomed, dreaming, with a lu-

minous purple shadow filling its breast. Silence and solitude folded them securely.

"Let's sit down," said Eleanor, turning aside to the shade of a beech tree that overhung the brook. She took off her hat, and leaned her head back against the trunk of the tree. Francis sat down beside her. He could hardly wait for her to go on with her surprising reminiscences. But he did not urge her, as, for a minute or two, she sat, musing, with her eyes in the brook.

"You see," she at last recommenced, speaking slowly, "I had never seen any one like you before. You may not remember that you sat at the same dining-room table with me." Francis interrupted her: "Oh, yes!" "Well, I used to watch you when you came in from your long, mysterious days on the mountains, and I used to wonder what made you look so happy. All the other young people looked contented enough. They had been playing golf or tennis, or going on picnics together; they were a jolly lot. But you were different. I didn't know what to make of you.

"One Sunday, the minister in the church read about Moses coming down from the mountain; and I thought of your face. I think I stood a little in awe of you.

"Perhaps that was why I didn't try harder to get you to talk with me. I wasn't sure I'd know what to say. I did make a sort of an effort once or twice, meeting you on the piazza or in the road. But I never got anywhere. You only said, yes, it was a pleasant day; and went on off by yourself to enjoy it. You were maddening.

"Of course, I did my best to guess at your interest.

I went out and looked at the mountains. I watched the sun set and the moon rise, and I frightened my father by spending a day alone in the woods. I understood better then, but I still needed to have you talk to me.

"That's why I followed you down to the brook, the evening of the Grail."

Francis said nothing during the whole of this fragmentary little recital. He was too astonished, he had too much to think about. Up to the last sentence he kept his eyes fastened earnestly on his companion but, as she raised hers, concluding the first part of her narrative, he suddenly looked away.

The action was more effective than words. It produced an abrupt change in Eleanor's mood, switching her off from continuance with her story, and bringing to full development the cloud which had shown itself in her eyes half an hour before.

"Francis!" It was evident that she did not realise her own use of his name. She leaned forward and challenged him, her hands clasped about her knees, her head thrown back. "Don't tell me that you've forgotten, that you don't care any more."

There was appeal and dismay in her voice. There was even a kind of fear. Her eyes summoned him inexorably till he once more looked up. He glanced at her, and made a mute, helpless gesture with his hands.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh! I knew it the minute I saw you; but I didn't believe it, I couldn't believe it. How did it ever happen?"

He did not answer her at once. The surprise of her

revelation wrought with the complexities of his own recent development to produce a hopeless confusion in him. He was distressed at her sorrow, and felt obscurely ashamed of himself.

"Eleanor," he said at last, using her name as unconsciously as she had used his, "I'm awfully sorry. I never dreamed that what I thought or felt made any difference to any one but myself. But I guess I can't help it. You see, I've been reading a lot of books and thinking about them; and I've come to the conclusion that nothing is very real, anyway, and therefore that we'd better concern ourselves with what we can take hold of most solidly."

The explanation was the best he could offer on the spur of the moment, but he did not look quite satisfied with it.

She lost no time in taking him up.

"What do you call solid?"

He hesitated. He was having to think fast to formulate his creed.

"Why, the everyday life of the modern world, I suppose: politics, business, industry, labour and capital."

"How much do you know about them?"

He shook his head deprecatingly.

"Well, I know a good deal," she informed him; "for I've lived in London. And I tell you there's nothing that changes so fast as the modern world. It's all right as a phase, a development, it's immensely interesting; but it isn't solid, it isn't real. That's what's the matter with it: it longs for reality."

She spoke very rapidly, sitting up straight, with

her grey eyes wide and a colour mounting into her cheeks.

"You see, I've done some thinking too," she went on; "and, though I haven't read very many books, I've met a good many people. They are most of them dead in earnest. It's really a very serious age we've been born into. But they're restless and dissatisfied. I was just like them, I'm like them now. In London I went in for all sorts of practical things—slum work and girls' clubs and charity fairs. I did my best, but I never seemed to get anywhere. There was always something lacking, something which I needed first, and then the other things would fit into place. I knew all the time what it was, for I never forgot your face. It was the Light, the Grail. You had pointed it out to me. But that wasn't enough. I must come back to you and learn how to climb to it. So I came back. And now"—her voice broke, and she paused, turning her face away—"you have given up," she concluded on a note of deep distress.

Francis had never in his life felt so unhappy, so at a loss. He was torn between his sudden conviction of faithlessness to his friend, and the apparently contradictory necessity of being true to himself. He must say something; but what? He plunged into speech.

"No," he protested, "no, Eleanor. It isn't that I've given up. I guess, perhaps, people don't ever give up things like that. It's just"—he hesitated—"just that I've changed my direction. I've accepted the fact that no one can ever really know anything in this world, and I've decided to make the best of appearances."

"I suppose you're what people call an agnostic."

"Well," he admitted, "what of that? There's nothing offensive about agnosticism, you know; it's purely defensive. It simply says it doesn't know. There may, or there may not, be some reality to correspond with the Grail idea. I hope there is; but, so long as I don't know, I can't commit myself. Truly, Eleanor,"—at last he spoke with a certain show of conviction—"I don't see how a humble and honest person can be anything but an agnostic."

"Humble and honest," she mused half aloud, looking away from him, "and stupid and lazy and indifferent. It means that you don't know that any sort of an affirmative is better than a negative; it means that you haven't cared enough about the Grail to find out whether it's true or not. I can't understand that. Why, I should think that, once having loved it as you did three years ago, you'd give all your time, you'd leave no stone unturned, to make sure about it one way or the other. I never was so disappointed. I'd much rather have you tell me, 'It isn't true,' than, 'Maybe it is and maybe it isn't. Really, I can't say.'"

She exaggerated his balanced tone in a manner that was not altogether fair, but that was effective. He flushed and looked away.

"I'm sorry, but I can't help it," he replied, after a moment, with dignity. "It is of course beyond one's power to convince one's self."

"Oh, no, it isn't!" She contradicted him so flatly that a gleam of real indignation crept into his eyes. "That's the silly mistake people make nowadays."

What's your will for? Go on! That's right. I want you to be angry with me. I want to hurt you dreadfully, you have hurt and disappointed me so much."

Her eyes met his squarely, flashing back fire to their fire, but there was a tremor in her voice.

"Eleanor,"—he put out his hand appealingly and laid hold on a corner of her skirt—"don't be so hard on me. One would think I had betrayed some compact, some sacred trust."

"You have!" she broke in unhesitatingly. "No one can feel and look the way you did three years ago, and get people to watching and following him, and then just stop, without being disloyal."

"But I didn't know."

"That doesn't make any difference. Your stupid 'knowing' again!"

"It was all so vague."

Her voice and the touch of her skirt had pricked his bubble of anger, and he pleaded his cause gently. He was relieved that she did not pull her dress away.

"Exactly!" Her mood did not flag. "That was why it was your business to study it soberly and find out just what it meant."

"But it's bound to be vague. No one can find out. It's beyond us all."

"I'm not so sure of that." She paused and looked at him thoughtfully a moment, and he was glad to detect a new point of view in her eyes, a more companionable sharing of interest. "What have you made of the Catholic Church?" she surprised him by asking abruptly.

He had not expected the turn, but he made it as swiftly as she, though lagging a little behind her. Once more his eyes deprecated.

"I haven't been inside a Catholic church since that Benediction," he confessed.

"Why not?"

Yes, surely, her mood had changed. It was no less earnest, but it was more patient, it dealt more tolerantly with him. He responded to it.

"For all sorts of reasons," he said. "I wanted to wait for you. I've become a member of the Congregational Church, and naturally I go there with my mother. I was on my guard against the Scarlet Woman; for, really, you know, she has done lots of harm. I was anxious to read and think as much as possible before I tackled the thing again."

He offered these disconnected reasons just as they occurred to him.

Eleanor pondered them.

"I didn't wait for you," she remarked, speaking reminiscently, with her eyes once more in the brook. "But then I couldn't. I was in the heart of a Catholic country, and you were thousands of miles away. I know the Catholic service by heart," she concluded. "But I don't in the least understand it," she added unexpectedly.

"You want to?" he questioned her.

"Oh, yes!" She brought her earnest gaze back to him. "More than anything else in the world. That's why I'm so disappointed. I thought that you would surely have worked the thing out by this time, and

that you'd tell me about it, and then it would all be clear. It never occurred to me that you could ignore it. You were so deeply impressed."

Her voice judged him sadly.

"Eleanor!" He sat up and shook himself. "Upon my word, I think you're too hard on me. I have really been doing my best. One has to grow slowly and feel one's way; one has to be honest. I haven't ignored it. It's been in the background of my consciousness all the time, and I have referred most everything to it. Just lately, I have deferred it, waiting—well, perhaps, waiting for you to return. Now, if you want to, I'll go to work on it, with you, seriously."

"Will you?" The cloud in Eleanor's eyes lifted a little, and a clear beam shone out from underneath. "That's good. I'm glad. Your last remarks aren't very consistent with those you made when we first began to talk. After all, you haven't forgotten; you haven't even lost interest. I thought you hadn't. I told you I couldn't believe it. But you did frighten me."

She smiled, and impulsively held out her hand in friendly gratulation.

"But I warn you"—his spirit repulsed hers a little, though, of course, he took her hand and held it closely—"that I may not be of much use to you, that I may even disappoint and grieve you worse than ever. I am honestly not prepared to find anything in the Catholic Church but——"

He paused.

"Humbug?" she suggested, unafraid. "Well, I told

you I'd rather know that a thing was false than go on dallying with an uncertainty about it."

They said nothing more for a while. The silence of the late afternoon brooded over them, and the long shadows stretched half way down the hill. The voice of the brook subdued itself to a still softer undertone. From the edge of the wood a hermit thrush sang with all the plaintive sweetness of the waning year.

"How beautiful!" Eleanor murmured. She turned her head, and laid her cheek against the trunk of the tree that held her. "I am so glad to be back. You and the valley together are surely going to teach me all I want to know."

Francis stared at her with such a baffled look of perplexity and humility that, meeting his eyes, she laughed suddenly.

"You poor thing! But I can't help it, I can't let you off. People like you are of the natural order of priests, and just have to bear the burden of other people's destinies."

"Well——" He sighed. "I'll do my best," he concluded soberly.

VII

FRANCIS did not sleep very well that night. He went to bed at his usual hour, and habit submerged him in prompt oblivion; but presently he woke with a sense that something which was not quite right would have to be dealt with. Then, for a long time, he lay on his back, with his hands clasped behind his head, and stared into the darkness.

What was the matter? Did he feel ashamed? Yes, evidently he did. But he was not at all sure that he ought to feel so; and he wrestled with his finger of scorn, if, perchance, it might not relent and caress him. He had done his best. Three years ago his young ignorance had persuaded him that the most important thing in life was something beyond and above it, something which was symbolised by a vanishing light on the mountain. Therefore he had set himself with all his heart to follow it. But, on reading and thinking and growing up, he had decided that such lights of the spirit are as unreal and unattainable as the lights which represent them in nature; and he had resolved not to waste himself on a delusion. Surely he had taken the only manly course. Ought he not to hold to it, and try to persuade Eleanor that his new way of thinking, though not so splendid as the old, was much more reliable?

The trouble was that her appeal had reached the old faith in him, where it lay asleep—not dead, after all—underneath the careful accumulations of his scholarship. Trouble, indeed! He drew a long breath which was partly a sigh, partly a laugh, as he remembered how, after supper that evening, he had gone off by himself in the meadows and had worshipped the stars and the silence, the mountains, the very grass, with more than his old groping passion. It was not just their loveliness which had moved him—that was all right, everybody admires the visible beauty of the world—but something behind and beyond them again: that very something which he had decided was not there.

Yet, if it was not there, how did he ever get the idea of it? This familiar old question confronted him, and drove him back to the safe ground of his agnosticism. When so many things may or may not be true, it is surely the part of a wise man not to commit himself.

If it had not been for the thought of Eleanor, his re-threshing of his problem might have ended, as usual, here. But what was he going to do about her? She had set her heart on the definite solution of mysteries which he had first suggested to her, and she had appealed to him, she had almost commanded him. Again he drew a long breath which, this time, was wholly a sigh; and once more his spirit echoed the plaint of Jeremiah and Moses and all on whom the burden of prophecy has been laid: "Lord, why must I do this? I do not know how. It is too much for me." With nothing but his own destiny and welfare to consider,

his balanced course would have been plain, but Eleanor's need left him no choice but to set to work thinking and surmising again.

He thought so hard there, alone in the night, that the pale dawn came creeping into his room before he turned over and went to sleep again.

The next morning he was all for hunting up Eleanor and suggesting another walk; but a telegram from his father forestalled him: "Meet me in New York. Sail Saturday for Italy."

This sudden change was not altogether a surprise. Vincent and Francis had originally intended to spend the whole summer abroad; but some work had come up which had kept the father at his desk. There were now only seven weeks left before the opening of the new term; but they were better than nothing. Perhaps an extension of time would be granted which would give the travellers two full months. Francis hurried to pack his suitcase, and then ran to find and take leave of Eleanor, his face aglow with anticipation, but touched with a very real shade of regret which was all the more flattering for being unconscious.

"We seem to be always meeting and parting," he said. "It's too bad."

"Yes," she replied. "And each time we leave such lots unsaid. But perhaps it's just as well to have our discussions to think about. You will think about our last one, won't you? Please. And you'll go to High Mass in Rome?"

"All right," he promised her, his eyes reflecting the serious look in hers. "I'll do the best I can."

"You must," she said. "That's your business."

His mother said little as she took leave of him. But when he opened his bag, he found that she had slipped into it a New Testament and a book of daily prayers.

They were gone two months, and they had a more wonderful time than Francis could have dreamed. Vincent was at his very best as a companion. The reaction from his recent long concentration on work left him free and light-hearted and alert for enjoyment. Nothing escaped him, and in everything he found some ministration of delight. He was young and amusing and sympathetic. Francis had never loved him so well.

"I tell you, boy," Vincent said, as, arm in arm, they paced the deck of the steamer, "it's great to have you grown up. I've got a real comrade at last. I've always wanted one."

Francis thought of his mother, and sighed with a curious pang of compassion. But he squeezed his father's arm.

"We seem to be pretty fairly alike," Vincent went on confidingly. "At least, we're in sympathy. It must be tormenting to have a son who doesn't see eye to eye with you. Like an astigmatism in your own vision—perplexing and maddening."

Francis winced—he had not the least idea why. He made haste to change his movement into another pressure of his father's arm.

"I expect to look at Italy through your eyes," he announced confidently.

And, for the most part, he did. On the day of their

landing his father would not let him come on deck until their steamer occupied just the right position in the bay of Naples. Then he called him, and stood back to watch the full beauty of the matchless scene burst upon him. Late that afternoon, when they had loitered about the picturesque streets and along the laughing, dreaming *quai*, and had steeped themselves in the blithe spirit of the place, Vincent suddenly called a cab and drove to the Museum. There he led the way straight to the Psyche; and for half an hour or so sat silent on a bench with his son, contemplating the pure, gracious bit of loveliness before them.

"I think it's I who look through your eyes," he said, as they rose to go. "You certainly make me see things in a new light, enjoy them all over again from the beginning. Perhaps, some day, you'll happen on something which I have never appreciated; and then I'll have a new revelation."

Naples and Rome, Siena and Florence: that was all they had time for, but that was enough. At the end Francis was even glad to get away and sort his treasures of memory and brood over them.

He had never had such a convincing, rapturous sense of the supreme importance of beauty. It was beauty everywhere to which his father called his attention, or which saluted him of its own accord, stealing out upon him from the midst of the most uninteresting street, or casting its magic spell over a whole garden or town. It was not incidental, this beauty; it was part of the very fabric of life in this old country. Past generations had been nourished on it, and had left it for

the admiration of the later age. He responded to it as never before, loved it, gave himself over to it, and longed to make it a part of himself and bear it away with him. Certain crises of ecstasy (in the Sistine Chapel, the Medici gardens, on the summit of Monte Cavo, in a solemn, candle-lit dusk in the Siena cathedral) left him shaken and breathless. Not even to his father would he confess how much he felt the glory of some things.

But his reticence was not altogether due to a natural sense of reserve. There was in it a baffling conviction that he felt more than his father felt, or, at least, that his emotion had a different element in it. It was that inexorable "something behind and beyond" which was at him again, which reached out and summoned him through the grace of colour and line. Once, when he and his father had sat a long time looking at a statue and his father said, "How exquisitely the line of the neck melts into the shoulder!" Francis, startled, barely caught himself back from exclaiming crudely, "I didn't know that she had any neck."

He himself was bewildered by this way he had of passing through the outer semblance of things and ignoring it. For it seemed that the semblance was necessary. He could not lose himself in worship before an ugly object; and the more beautiful a thing was, the deeper was the spell it cast over him. When his father had called his attention to the grace of the neck and shoulder line, he recognised and acknowledged its loveliness. What was more, he knew that he must have noticed it in the first place; for through it alone he

had passed to its formless significance. He wished he could discuss the mysterious process with his father, but he dared not run the risk of introducing a false note into the harmony of their companionship.

He did not forget Eleanor's request that he hear High Mass in some Roman church; and he spent a good deal of time wondering how he was going to manage it. Once or twice, when he and his father were looking at mosaics or frescoes in some dim chapel or wide marble nave, a sound of chanting arose and his father instantly shut his guide book and thrust it into his pocket. "Let's get out of here, son," he said. "I can't stand that mummary." Francis knew that he must not think of proffering a deliberate request to attend Mass.

But one day Fortune favoured him. Vincent had received an unusually large consignment of letters from his bankers; and decided to return with them to his hotel before carrying out the plan which he had made for the day.

"They may keep me an hour or so, Francis," he said. "Is there anything you'd like to do?"

Francis considered. They were then standing in front of a little church, inconspicuous and modest, quite unnoticed by Baedeker.


"I'll go in here and wait," he replied. "There may be a fresco or an altar piece."

As the heavy door swung to behind him and he stood in the cool silence, shut off from the noise and the glare of the street, he saw that a service was just beginning. The candles on the plain little altar were lighted; and priests and acolytes stood before it. There were not

many worshippers—only a fringe about the chancel rail and a few groups scattered through the nave and aisles—but they were all attentive and reverent; and Francis, tiptoeing softly, made haste to join them. Here was his chance. High Mass was in progress, and he was free to witness it. He found a place by a pillar, where he could watch both the priests and the people, and he gave himself over to close observation.

It suited his mood of enquiry that the place was so bare and the service so meagre. He wanted to keep himself well in hand and see just what happened. For once he had no desire to be carried away and made blind to outer semblance; for it was outer semblance itself that interested him. He steadied and summoned his eye and his ear to apprehend all they could. The lapsed arguments of his early months in college came back upon him in a flood. Philosophy had not succeeded in making much of his first Benediction; yet neither had it laid its ghost. Now what would it make of his first Mass? He appealed to it seriously.

At first he was sorry that he had no manual of the service. He feared that he was going to find it so unintelligible that he could make nothing of it. But his college Latin came to his aid. The celebrating priest had a clear, resonant voice, and he spoke the words of the service slowly. The result was that after a little Francis found himself able to follow the sequence of prayers, of gospel and epistle and creed, of praise and supplication. With all his powers of sympathetic transference, he lent himself to the endeavour to find out what it was all about.



It was a definite sequence—of that there could be no manner of doubt. It knew where it was going, and it marched with a certain grand confidence which was very impressive. It did not hurry—in fact, it delayed; but that was evidently because the development was too important to be precipitated. It wanted to stimulate reverence to the highest pitch of attention.

As Francis stood, watching and waiting, the memory of other scenes of suspense flashed over his mind without deflecting it. He remembered how breathlessly he had watched the moon rise behind Green Peak in Vermont, and how long the golden rim had taken to lift itself out of the slowly brightening sky. That process had had much the same fettering effect on him which the similar process of the Mass was having now. Both tended inevitably to supreme consummations which must on no account be missed. When the moon had risen, it transformed the night, lighting up the valley and casting a significant spell of beauty over everything. When the Mass should have spoken its secret, what new glory would crown the world of thought? Francis wondered intently. He could not avoid the conviction that what was about to happen would pierce to the very heart of reality.

The music was not very good. He was glad. It left his mind free to watch closely, to hold itself in poise. But when it ceased, the silence was all the more impressive for the harshness of the sounds that had preceded it.

Francis was already on his knees. He had followed the movements of the congregation. But when the hush

fell, he bent his head and covered his eyes; and, for the first time, emotion touched him. He had to strive to keep from being carried away. Then the sanctus bell rang through the church, and all the people about him swayed to a more complete prostration than they had yet confessed. He swayed with them—he could not help it—and for a minute or two he lost all track of the service that he had been watching so carefully.

When he raised his head, the crisis was over. The priests and the people were erect, the music was jangling, the door behind him was beginning to swing to and fro. The great thing had happened, and life was resuming its usual level.

It certainly had been stupendous. He was more impressed with its importance than if it had taken place in the midst of pomp and ceremony, with the magic of beautiful music pervading it. His sudden subjection, when he had just been so alert and watchful, surprised him and gave him much to think about. He went and sat on the steps of a chapel, and pondered earnestly.

What did it mean? The Incarnation! His memory gave him the word mechanically, echoing it from the theological information which, like every intelligent person, he had amassed in his youth. But that was no good to him. All those old terms had outlived their usefulness, and were incapable of playing a significant part in a vital religion. He made an instinctive mental movement to reject the present suggestion. Then, suddenly, like a dark lantern, it flashed so bright a ray into his unexpectant heart that he was dazzled. The

Incarnation! Why, that meant simply the presence of God in matter, that meant——

He was all alone in the little church, but if he had not been, it would have made no difference. He rose to his feet, he spread his arms wide, he turned toward the altar above which the light of the Presence was glowing. "God!" he cried. "Why—God!" He stood transfixed with realisation.

Revelations of all kinds have it for their traditional privilege to come with a high-handed suddenness; but this was so abrupt that, for a minute or two, it defeated itself. Francis knew what had happened; but he could not take it in, he could not deal with it. As soon as he regained control of his body, he knelt down at a prayer-desk before the altar and hid his face in his hands—not because he was shaken with emotion, for he remained singularly calm, but because he wanted to give himself every aid to thought. It was not quite enough to know. He must, then and there, tell himself what it was that he knew, in order that he and himself together—witness and collaborator—might preserve the knowledge.

God: that was really all. For years he had gone about and about the problem of life, trying it with all sorts of philosophies, scanning it, analysing it, turning it this way and that. Finally he had given it up as unsolvable. And all the time the solution had lain, as plain as a title on a title-page, in the very religion and the very word which have always made it their business to attend to it.

Why had he been so stupid? It was not as if he had

had no surmise. The Benediction, three years before, had explicitly summoned him. But perhaps he had not been ready; perhaps his temperament had demanded his long searchings and testings, even his agnosticism. It might be that his conviction would prove all the deeper and richer for the enquiry and experience which had preceded it. He made up his mind that he must redeem the past by forcing it to enrich the future.

God: to this one all sufficient word he came back again and again, wondering at its simplicity. God in the mountains and in the seas, in music and poetry and the love of friends, in statues, in beautiful cities, in all that touches and draws the human heart. God was the spell that beauty had always cast over him; God was the "something behind and beyond." Surely he must have known this; he could not believe that he had not understood. But it had taken the definite statement of the Mass to bring the knowledge home to him. He saw now that the Christian Church exists primarily to assert this divine indwelling, and that daily Mass is celebrated to keep the world continually in mind of it. Nothing is so important. It sums up all philosophies, all revelations, all theories. It is the one, the only thing, that matters supremely. His mind embraced it with a boundless feeling of having found the pearl of great price.

But before very long a nameless trouble stirred in the midst of his gladness; and, rousing himself uneasily, he realised that he was thinking of his father. For an instant his mood wavered, and he remained

on his knees. Then, abruptly, panic seized him and he sprang to his feet. What was he doing? Had he yet time to shake off his possession and change his mood before his father returned? He dragged out his watch, drew a breath of surprise and relief as he saw that he had been in the church less than an hour, and hurried out into the street.

He did not stop to analyse his sudden necessity, as he strode into the little curiosity shop which, fortunately, neighboured the church; but afterwards he knew that it had been compounded of a shy reluctance to discuss, or even to indicate, his new interest, and of a desperate desire not to let anything mar the sympathetic comradeship that obtained between his father and himself. Resolutely he steadied his bewildered mind before a table of old brasses. "Look!" he commanded it. And, by and by, his vision cleared and focussed, and he saw that he was contemplating some admirable pieces.

Decidedly Fortune favoured him that day. When his father came up the street, he was able to run to the door of the shop and cry, "Father! Come in here. I've made a find." And, in the ensuing excitement of choice and barter, he managed to dispose of the lingering mental traces of his recent preoccupation and to hide them so securely that Vincent never so much as suspected them. Fifteen minutes later father and son went on their way, laughing and talking as wholeheartedly as ever.

The experience stood fast, however. It was one of the few things in life that, once having happened, make

no doubt of their permanence. Its very consenting to be put aside, to defer to other interests, proved its sincerity. It could afford to wait. Ignored, neglected, it yet managed to pervade everything.

Loveliness was more lovely than ever to Francis, who now looked through and beyond it with the confident gaze of one who knows what he is looking for. Secure in his finding, he dallied with the outer semblance, and thereby pleased his father.

"I used to think you rather unobservant, Francis; and I never could understand that—you are so fond of beautiful things. But Italy is making you keener eyed. Yes, isn't that an exquisite tracery?"

Vincent was a late riser; and Francis found that, by getting up early and going for a morning walk, he could manage to hear Mass almost every day. His spirit fed on it, and grew, and put forth wings. When he knelt with the worshippers, and the sanctus bell spoke through the hush, he felt the touch of the finger of God thrill through creation and all things become one in their divinity.

He and his father finished their trip in mutual gratitude and content. Each one had had an unblemished good time.

VIII

HE had tried not to think about Eleanor—save in connection with the problem which she had set him—since he came away from home. He had found that the personal memory had a curious touch of restlessness in it. But on the homeward-bound steamer, the necessity of ordering and clarifying his experience, so that he might share it with her, imposed on him hours of meditation during which her grey eyes were constantly before him. Then the speed of the steamer seemed slow. He watched the western horizon, and was irrationally vexed at its persistent aloofness. Once in a while he noticed his own impatience and wondered at it. He had certainly never wanted to see anybody so much. But he told himself, not unnaturally and with perfect candour, that his eagerness had its spring in his desire to tell her his news.

When he reached home, he enquired at once if she were in town; and was annoyed at his mother for being unable to tell him.

"You'll have to go and see for yourself," said his father, with a pleasant light in his eyes.

He did so, that evening. He ran all the way from his house to hers. To his immense satisfaction, he found her alone in a firelit room, playing Beethoven. She rose to receive him without even finding a chord

to resolve her interrupted harmony; and he had enough of a musical sense to know that that meant a good deal.

But then she suddenly switched on the light in a shaded electric lamp and motioned him toward a chair.

"Sit down," she cried. "Begin at the beginning and tell me all about it. I can see from your face that you've had a wonderful time."

"I don't want to begin at the beginning," he answered, as he subsided into his chair and looked across the hearthrug at her. "I want to begin in the middle and tell you about just one thing."

He spoke with such dwelling emphasis, and his eyes shone so significantly, that she was arrested.

"Shall I guess?" she murmured.

He nodded.

"You have learned the secret of the Mass."

Her tone was full of such awed reverence, such entire docility and belief, that it changed his mood a little. He laughed.

"Oh! that's a big statement," he deprecated. "No, I'm not so wise as all that. But I've made a bold guess. Perhaps, if I tell you about it, you can help me work it out."

She waited silently, with her gaze full and unwavering.

"Well, it's really very simple." He leaned forward and took the poker—time-honoured assistant in man's efforts to get things into words. "But it isn't so easy to state," he added, with a sudden flash of admission.

"It's—it's—I suppose theological terms don't mean anything to you," he ventured, glancing at her. Then, as he saw her face fall, "Of course not. They never meant anything to me. But I've got hold of one now (or, rather, it has got hold of me) that's—well, it's a nutshell, it's a dark lantern, it's the flower in the cran-nied wall. The Church calls it the Incarnation. You and I call it the light on the mountain, the colour of the sky, the harmony of music, the general loveliness of the world. We must admit that at least the Church has the advantage of conciseness."

"You think that they mean the same thing?"

She did not seem to doubt him; she simply questioned.

"I'm sure of it," he answered. "And, probably, if the Church had been true to itself and the people true to their faith in it, we might have saved ourselves all our trouble. There's nothing beyond the Incarnation. It answers everything."

"It's rather pitiful, isn't it?" he went on when, saying nothing, she seemed to wait for his elucidation, "that we should have held the key of our destiny in our hands for nineteen hundred years without using it. On the steamer, coming home, I read the New Testament through three times, and was ashamed of myself. Sure enough: there it all was. 'I am the light of the world.' 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' 'I in you, and ye in me.' 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God.' 'Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us.' The same thing over and over again. It

was the sum and substance of the teaching of Jesus, the one great lesson He came to teach: that our world is instinct with divinity, and that that is the reason why we love it so well. But we have insisted on not understanding. We have gone on, searching and questioning, trying out every possible theory of the nature of things. We have given ourselves most heart-rending pains; and all to no purpose at all. Isn't it tragic?"

"But how do you know?" She pulled her chair a little nearer the fire, and leaned her elbow on her knee. "How do you know?"

Either helplessly or deliberately, she left her question vague.

"The Mass told me," he answered promptly. "That's just what it means. It acts the whole process of God's indwelling. It's a real drama of creation."

"A sort of symbol?"

She knit her brows over her brooding eyes, and took her turn at poking the fire.

"Yes, if you want to call it that. But that doesn't belittle it, for all our knowledge comes by way of symbols. Reality is intangible and ineffable. We can love it and lose ourselves in it, but we can't think or talk about it unless we find some sort of body for it. That's why God gave us Christ, the Word. He wanted to speak to us."

"Oh!" said Eleanor. "Yes! I see."

She looked up suddenly, and he perceived, from the leaping intelligence in her eyes, that he had hit on an enlightening phrase. He was very glad. He knew that he might have gone on talking for hours, lucidly

explaining his belief, and that, lacking some piercing idea, the armour of her ignorance might have remained intact.

She waited a moment, her eyes wide with the scope of her new conception; then she proved her aptness by swinging away on her own account.

"So that, really, Christ's body is one with the bodies of the mountains and stars," she suggested breathlessly.

"So it is!" he assented, his own eyes aglow. "That's what the creed means when it says, 'By Whom all things were made.' And when a Catholic receives the Sacrament, he takes the whole creation into himself."

They were silent. The climax struck them both as being rather stupendous.

"I wonder," Eleanor mused after a few moments, clasping her hands about her knees and staring into the fire, "if it's just a Catholic who does that. All the denominations have Communion services, haven't they?"

Francis's shining face clouded, and he stirred uneasily.

"I don't know." He shook his head. "That's one of the many things I've got to try to find out. Yes, of course, all the churches have Communion. Whether it means the same thing to them all is what I want to discover. They certainly don't all express the same thing by it."

His tone and gesture made Eleanor turn away from the fire and look at him.

"You're not going to enjoy that investigation?" she questioned. "I see—on account of your mother."

"Yes, and my father," he answered, grateful for her sympathetic intelligence. "He hates all religion as much as she cares for her special brand of it."

"Yet he loves beauty," Eleanor pondered.

"Intensely. I don't know but maybe that's the trouble. He finds it an end in itself. Perhaps he shows his wisdom there. I have always thought him the wisest man in the world."

Francis's manner made haste to repudiate any criticism of his father.

"Well," said Eleanor, "well,"—she leaned back in her chair and stared into the fire—"what are you going to do about it?"

"Tackle it!" Francis replied, rather brusquely. "I've got to, haven't I? Didn't we agree that it's the most important thing in the world?"

Eleanor smiled.

"Do you realise how you've changed?" she asked, once more lifting her friendly gaze to his. "Just two months ago you assured me that agnosticism was the only philosophy for an intelligent, self-respecting person. Europe didn't lose any time in converting you, did it?"

"It wasn't Europe," he answered slowly, smiling back at her. "It was you."

"Me?" She was startled. "Why, I saw you only that one afternoon, and I had nothing to give you. I was asking something of you."

"Precisely!" he nodded. "I was dreadfully ashamed that I had to disappoint you. I went out that very evening and asked the hills to forgive me."

"And they did?"

"Yes," he answered; and left the statement to explain itself.

"So that now . . ."

She broke off. Her voice was shaken, and there were tears in her eyes.

"So that now," he took up her words, seeming to understand her emotion, "I am going to devote myself to learning all I can, for the sake of both of us."

She was silent a minute. Her tears overflowed, and she frankly wiped them away, laughing at them.

"You see," she explained, "I really had the matter a good deal at heart, and I was dreadfully disappointed when I thought you had forgotten. I can't tell you—I guess I don't have to tell you—how relieved I am."

She got up abruptly, and, going to the piano, burst forth into the triumphant chords of Chopin's twentieth prelude.

While she was playing, the door behind her opened and her father came into the room. Francis knew at once who he must be, but expected him to stop where he was and wait till the music was over; therefore, he did not rise from his chair nor divert his attention. But music was to Mr. Ramsey what a clump of flowers might be in the path of a preoccupied dog. With his hand extended, he crossed the room, calling out in a big, hearty voice:

"You must be Merwin's son. Aren't you? Well, well! I'm glad to meet you. I've heard both your father and Nelly talk about you. Just back from Europe? Had a good time?"

He completely drowned out Eleanor's *pianissimo*.

Francis got to his feet and returned the cordial handshake as best he could. But he cast an appealing glance at Eleanor. Why didn't she stop playing? He could not help listening for her singing notes underneath her father's remarks, and the conflict of attention bewildered him. He did not know what he was saying to his unexpected host. The grey eyes behind the piano shone with a sudden amusement and mischief, and the prelude went on to its natural conclusion; but it did have sufficient mercy to spare the situation a *da capo*. Eleanor stopped and sat, smiling and watching, with her hands on the keys.

Frederick Ramsey was a big man. His shoulders were broad and his bald head, with its fringe of grey hair, overtopped that of Francis. He was very well dressed and evidently quite as well fed. His whole person exuded a comfortable suggestion of club rooms and cocktails and valets and expensive tailors. His eyes—grey like Eleanor's—were shrewd and humorous and peremptory. His chin was that of a master of affairs. Francis found himself wondering in what language he should talk to him.

But the older man took no more account of youthful uncertainties and hesitations than of youthful music; and he lost no time in proclaiming the language in which he chose to communicate.

"Had a good time abroad? Well, that's all right. Europe's a jolly place. But America's better, isn't it? America's the country in which to live and work."

"Yes," replied Francis. "Yes, of course." Then he

suddenly made up his mind to speak his own language as boldly as this undaunted man spoke his; and he added, "I've come back very eager to help on the cause of American beauty and righteousness."

He knew how priggish this speech must sound, and he took a perverse satisfaction in it. He felt himself under an obscure necessity to rub Eleanor's father the wrong way.

"Lord!" said Mr. Ramsey. He turned and cast a whimsical glance at Eleanor; but her face was in shadow, and he could not read her expression. "You young folks do fly pretty far over my old head," he continued meekly, approaching the fire to knock the ashes from his fragrant cigar.

Eleanor left the piano and came forward into the lamplight. Her eyes looked anxious beneath their lingering amusement.

"Sit down," she suggested to the two men. "Here's your ash tray, father. You smoke, don't you?" turning to Francis. "Please do," her eyes coaxed.

Now, up to the last few months, Francis had smoked, in moderation. But he had never greatly cared for the practice, and had finally given it up. As he looked down into Eleanor's face, he was in two minds: whether to gratify her, or whether to stick to what had become a tolerant sort of principle with him. Principle won out. It was reinforced by the devil, in the shape of an edgy unwillingness to concede anything to the suave man on the hearthrug.

With her look of anxiety turning into a sort of dismay, Eleanor took possession of the conversational

helm; and, perched on the arm of her father's chair, she made Francis tell them both about the secular things he had seen abroad—the hotels at which he had stayed, the drives and automobile trips he had taken, the towers he had climbed, the steamers on which he had crossed. He had no choice but to answer her questions, and soon she had him talking intelligently about the condition of Italian politics. Her father was mollified. The look of contemptuous boredom left his face, and he joined in the conversation genially.

But Francis did not stay much longer. To do him justice, he remembered that this was his first evening at home, and that his mother would naturally expect a share of it. He took his leave in a sufficiently creditable manner.

"Budding evangelist, Nelly?" Mr. Ramsey asked, as the door closed and Eleanor came back to the fire.

"No," she replied lightly, "I believe he's going to fit himself to teach philosophy."

"Well"—her father smiled at her rallying—"it speaks well for him that you like him, and that he's the son of that very unpious person, Vincent Merwin. I guess he'll come out all right. But you'll have to teach him a lesson or two in worldly amenity."

IX

FRANCIS had looked forward, with a keen intellectual anticipation, to his first year of graduate work. He had promised himself great joy in the chance to devote himself wholly to the study of philosophy, fathoming the various systems to the full extent of his particular plumb line, piecing out the plumb line as far as possible. But, even before he began his lectures, he knew that he was in for disappointment.

It seemed absurd to confess, even to himself, that he had no further interest in complex and elaborate systems of thought. He was so young and unlearned, and they were so venerable. But the fact remained (and in the bottom of his heart he knew that it was not at all absurd) that, since his first Catholic Mass, all other theories of reality seemed to him a waste of time.

"What's the matter, Merwin?" one of his professors asked him after a few weeks. "You don't seem to take hold very well. And you did such capital work last year. You haven't lost interest, have you?"

Francis hesitated. But, fortunately, it seemed so impossible to the professor that his favourite pupil should have grown indifferent, that he spared him an answer.

"I suppose you're still under the spell of Europe," he suggested kindly. "Well, that's not unnatural; but wake up as soon as you can."

His father and mother knew nothing of his flagging of interest; nor, for some time, did they know of his constant attendance at the Roman Catholic church. He had always been given to morning walks, especially on Sunday, when breakfast was late; and no one was the wiser for his weekly hearing of early Mass. At eleven o'clock he went as usual with his mother to the Congregational service.

He was perfectly upright in his reticence. He wanted to get his reasons well in hand before he spoke of his new interest to those who would not understand it, who might disapprove of it.

Eleanor went to Saint Joseph's too. But she preferred High Mass; and, having no church obligations, she was free to please herself. So that, save for an occasional Benediction, she and Francis seldom heard a service together.

It may have been that their separateness was actuated by another, half unconscious motive. The relation between them was one of a growing tenderness which made it hard for them to preserve their poise in each other's presence, and almost impossible for them to think of anything but each other. Sometimes, on their walks in the country, there fell long, troubled silences which reminded Francis of a distant cloud which he had once seen, shot through and through with voiceless lightning. Of course he knew that he loved her. But he was not yet quite ready to tell her so. Meantime, he had often to hold her image at arm's length.

It is strange that Providence does not more fre-

quently respect the conscientious plans of its children, and let them work out. Does it, perhaps, think that that way lies too much of ease? Francis had ordered and clarified his mind until he was all but ready to take his father into his confidence, and was just waiting a happy opportunity, when Vincent surprised the whole situation by getting caught in a downpour of rain outside Saint Joseph's church. He dashed up the steps for refuge; and, pushing open the door, found his son on his knees, rapt before the Host.

It had been a day of particular stress and restlessness with Francis. He had spent the morning, trying in vain to interest himself in the subtleties of Hegel's philosophy. In the early afternoon he had gone to see if Eleanor would take a walk with him; and, not finding her at home, he had drifted in the direction of Saint Joseph's church. There was no service at this hour; and at first it had not occurred to his Protestant mind to go in. Why should one enter a perfectly empty and idle and not particularly beautiful church? But then he had noticed that the door stood ajar, and suddenly he had run up the steps.

The day was cloudy, and the big interior of the church was dusky with shadows. The light came dimly through the coloured windows. As Francis had foreseen, there was no one there; but his expectation was, nevertheless, directly contradicted, for he instantly knew that the place was anything but empty. Rather, it was tingling with an all-pervading, omnipotent sense of an awful Presence which brought him to his knees.

The light, hanging before the altar, proclaimed it; and all the shadows were instinct with it.

The experience was a new one to Francis. On entering the woods in Vermont he had been sometimes arrested, subdued, touched with divinity. But his knees had not yielded their tribute then. Now he knelt down, just where he was, in the back of the church, and hid his face in his hands. All his restlessness dropped from him, and he knew himself at home. It was awful but very sweet to be thus alone with God.


He never knew how long he knelt there before he heard his father's voice, speaking anxiously: "Francis! Francis!" He felt a solicitous hand on his shoulder, and, as soon as he could, he looked up into his father's face. But he had to look a long time before he really saw who it was; and when recognition was fully awake, he gave expression to it in such a beatific smile that Vincent was frightened.

"Boy, what's the matter? Are you ill? Come home with father."

Francis gulped. He did not want to laugh, for, as soon as he knew anything, he knew that the situation was serious; but he could not help feeling the humour of his father's concern.

"I'm not crazy, dad," he whispered, getting to his feet. "I'm not sick nor moonstruck nor anything abnormal. I'm just——"

As, unmindful of the rain, they went down the steps of the church, he put his arm through his father's and pressed close to him. If he could hold him with his



hand, perhaps the dreaded mental chasm might not yawn between them.

"Well," he continued presently, "it's something I've been meaning to tell you for some time, but I haven't been quite ready."

Vincent turned and looked at his son. He seemed hardly relieved by the reassurance that the boy was not sick.

"What do you mean?" he said sharply. "Tell me at once."

The rain had slackened, but, if it had not, they would probably have paid no attention to it. They did not turn homeward; but, with mutual, perhaps unconscious consent, they directed their footsteps down an unfrequented street which led out into the country.

Francis was silent. The crisis had come so suddenly, and had found him so genuinely unprepared, that his mind could not help being slow in dealing with it. But he felt his father's anxiety; and, as fast as he could, he summoned and marshalled his thoughts. He must speak rapidly, but he must use just the right words. The double challenge roused his whole being.

"Father," he began, "you trust me, don't you?"

"Why, yes, boy," said Vincent, after a slight pause which Francis understood to be one of realisation, not of doubt. "Of course I do."

He looked up with a frank smile of comradeship in which there shone a certain relief. In his first bewilderment, he had all but forgotten that the person who had caused his alarm was, after all, one in whom he had confidence.

"Well," Francis continued, meeting his eyes with all the trust and affection of which his own eyes were capable, "then you must believe that I haven't done anything disgraceful.

"The gist of the thing is," he went on quickly, encouraged by the success of his first step, "that I've taken what seems to me the biggest and most promising road leading from the love of beauty where you started me. It's a logical development. If you hadn't been a little differently constituted, you might have taken it too.

"It's strange what a big difference a little difference can make," he went on, as Vincent, listening intently, refrained from comment. "For the most part, you and I are as alike as two peas. But—well, you read Keats and I read Francis Thompson; you prefer Tschaikowsky, I prefer Beethoven; you teach history, and I'm getting ready to teach philosophy. You like to dwell on beautiful things, and I want to get behind them. It's natural that you shouldn't care for the Catholic service, except as a spectacle; and that it should mean everything to me. You never have minded my other differences; you're not going to mind this, are you?"

"Francis, do you mean to tell me,"—Vincent spoke as reasonably as he could, but there was real dismay in his tone—"that the Catholic Church means anything to you, let alone everything?"

Once more his alarm banished every other sentiment from his face.

Francis nodded.

"It seems to me to hold the key to all the philoso-

phies," he said, "and to be the shrine of all loveliness."

"Oh, but, boy, you don't know—I must tell you—this is the result of your indifference toward history—you are simply ignorant—listen!"

Poor Vincent burst forth in a flood of words that was at first incoherent, but that he presently steadied into a masterful stream. With the swift competence of one who knows what he is talking about, he gave his son an outline of Church history, dwelling on the pre-Reformation abuses, the prejudices, the absurdities, the atrocities.

"There never has been such a foe of progress," he declared. "It has set itself against every new idea; every scheme for improvement has had to fight it to the death. It has been a disgrace to our human nature. It has deliberately pandered to some of our worst traits: superstition, sentimentality, laziness. It has done us infinitely more harm than good. An intelligent man simply can't have anything to do with it, Francis. It's impossible."

Francis listened. Of course the charge was familiar enough to him. He had not altogether forgotten his Sophomore lectures in history. But now, as then, the recital did not seem to him very important.

"It's no use, dad." He shook his head, smiling disarmingly. "You're a historian. I'm a philosopher; and that which is seems to me much more important than that which has been."

"But that which is is the product of that which has been," protested his father.

"Not in intention," replied Francis slowly. "The intention, the idea itself, has existed unchanged from the beginning. It's that which interests me."

"Good heavens! You mean to say you don't care what effect it has on the life of the world, on the course of history?"

Vincent's voice rang out.

"Yes, of course I care," Francis answered; "for it exists for the sake of the world. But perhaps the world has been largely to blame for the abuses you mentioned. The Church is a counsel of perfection, and we're not yet good enough for it."

"Counsel of perfection!" In spite of himself, Vincent was growing angry. "You call that perfection—that mummery of lights and processions and bells, of incense and incantation, that tyranny over man's reason, that—faugh! Francis, really, you must be mad. I do hope you are mad."

Francis sighed heavily. This was worse than he had feared.

"Don't you think it beautiful, father?" he asked.

"Sometimes, yes, rather," Vincent conceded. "But only as a spectacle; not when I think what it means."

"But a thing can't be beautiful unless it means something beautiful," Francis protested. "The Catholic service means"—he paused—"the incarnation of the divine in the human, the secret of all life and love and beauty," he concluded.

They were silent a long time. Doubtless they both felt tired and discouraged. Their blind walk had carried them out of the city, and the autumn dusk was

falling around them when they returned to a consciousness of their surroundings. On the crest of a little hill they stopped and looked about them. The beauty of the grey, rolling country gently wooed them from their distress and laid its familiar spell upon them.

"Father!" Francis again thrust his arm through Vincent's, and appealed to him. "You *are* going to trust me, aren't you?"

"Well,"—the older man roused himself—"I suppose I'll have to, son. But can you tell me what you are going to do?"

"No," confessed Francis, "I wish I could. I wish I knew, myself."

"You're not willing to take my word for it that the Catholic Church is a huge mistake?"

"I can't do that, father. You know I can't. You haven't brought me up to take other people's word for things."

This remark had an unexpected and unintended effect on Vincent. He pondered it an instant; then he turned and looked at his son with a flashing relief.

"Thank heaven, I haven't!" he cried. "By Jove! I guess that will save you. For as soon as you get down to a serious study of the Roman claims, you'll find that the whole system depends on taking people's word. You never can do it in the world. George! but I feel better."

He hugged Francis's arm against his side with a swift return to entire comradeship, and laughed aloud.

Francis smiled ruefully.

"I'm afraid you're right there, father," he said. "I've been having my own misgivings. But please don't be quite so happy about it. Every difficulty which I find in the Catholic Church is going to hurt me a lot."

"Nonsense!"

But then his father was sorry that he had spoken so lightly, for Francis's face remained sober.

"Life will provide you with plenty of causes in which you will find satisfaction," the older man promised gently.

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X

JANE took her son's new interest harder than Vincent. At least she was more hopeless about it.

Vincent himself revealed the situation to her. Francis wanted to do so, but became convinced of the wisdom of giving his father a first free hand.

"You can't possibly treat it as lightly as I mean to," Vincent argued, on the way home from their autumn walk. "You wouldn't think it right. But, on the other hand, no lightness can be too casual to spare your mother a shock."

Francis laughed, with a hint of bitterness in his voice.

"One would think I was about to marry a chorus girl or enlist in the Balkan war."

"Well, remember, son,"—his father paused at the foot of their steps and laid his hand on Francis's arm—"there's no smoke without some fire; and the popular prejudice against the Catholic Church has reason at its heart."

Jane was in her crex-carpeted room, preparing her Sunday-school lesson. She looked up when her husband paused in the doorway.

"Well?"

"Nothing much." Vincent smiled as though he were savouring a chance amusement. "It's the younger gen-

eration, that's all. These children certainly do go in for all kinds of experience. This afternoon I found Francis praying in Saint Joseph's."

He gave the information so lightly that Jane's docile mind tried at first to deal lightly with it. But the word "praying" focussed her attention, and her eyes brightened.

"Francis is a good boy," she commented.

Then, as Vincent said nothing, and his look made her feel a little uneasy, "What is Saint Joseph's?" she added. "An Episcopal church? I never heard of it."

"No," answered her husband, still more carelessly. "It's that big Roman Catholic church on Pleasant Street."

"Vincent Merwin!" Jane dropped her pencil and wheeled about from her desk. She stared at her husband. Her cheeks turned pale. "Why, that's—that's awful!"

"Oh, no, it isn't, Jane." Vincent crossed the threshold and came and stood by his wife. He felt a good deal more sympathetically sorry for her than he intended to show. "I was afraid you'd feel that way; but, really, it's all right, it's all in the course of young development. It won't hurt him any. It's just a phase."

"I never went through any such phase," Jane protested, still staring with her horrified eyes.

Her husband could not help smiling a little at the idea.

"Nor I, either," he admitted pleasantly. "It's just what I said: the new generation. It has to try out

everything. Don't worry, Jane. I tell you the boy has got too much sense, he's had too good a backing and training to make stupid mistakes. He'll come out all right. Just let him alone. Don't take him too seriously."

Jane said nothing further. Her mind was now wholly committed to wrestling with the news which had leaped so suddenly upon it. Her gaze grew so fixed that Vincent found himself presently wanting to get away from it. After all, he could do nothing more for her while she was in this mood. He turned toward the door.

"Remember: don't take him too seriously," he called back. "That's very important."


But that night, when Francis was going to bed, his mother tapped at his door.

"Have you said your prayers yet?" she enquired.

"No," he replied, standing in his bathrobe, with the doorknob in his hand, embarrassed and ill at ease, disliking most unreasonably to invite her in.

"That's good," she observed, effecting her own entrance as a matter of course. "I've come to say them with you. But first I want to read you a chapter from Galatians."

She sat down on the edge of his bed, and read him a number of verses, beginning, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" Then she put out her hand and pulled him down to kneel with her beside the bed. "O Lord, preserve our hearts from folly," she prayed aloud. "Let us not stray in forbidden paths. Keep us true to our heritage and our profession. Guard



us from the shame of disloyalty." Fortunately for her son, she gave him no chance to pray at all. She seemed to feel that this occasion devolved altogether upon her.

Now Francis had, just that morning, acquired a little crucifix which he had found in a curiosity shop; and he had been looking forward to a time of worship before it when he went to bed. But his mother's action spoiled all his dear plan. When she had left him, kissing him good-night rather solemnly, and leaving on his study table a pamphlet entitled, "The Scarlet Woman," he could only sit on the edge of his bed, and laugh, and indulge in a few imprecations of good old Saint Paul and Martin Luther with their Galatians. In the middle of the night, however, he woke from a restless dream, and, getting up, he groped in his table drawer until he found his crucifix. Then he put it under his pillow, and, clasping it in one hand, he slept quietly. It was his first experience of the homely, comforting uses to which divinity may be put.

There was this advantage about the awareness of his parents: he felt that he had openly committed himself, and was now not only at liberty but in honour bound to pursue his absorbing interest. Moreover, their very antagonism gave solidity to his experience. Things do not seem actual in this partial world unless some kind of a public reacts both favourably and unfavourably on them. Two or three days after his walk with his father, Francis returned to Saint Joseph's and waylaid a priest whom he found just leaving the church.

The step was a bold one. He did not know exactly what he wanted to say, still less in what words he

should say it. He did not even look to see what kind of man he might be addressing. The important point seemed to him to say something, to make some beginning.

"If you please—would you mind——" he stammered. Then he caught a full glimpse of the face before him, and suddenly knew that his hesitations and apologies were out of place. "Would you be so kind as to tell me how I ought to go to work to study the doctrines of your church?" he ended simply and straightforwardly.

It was not a genial face into which he found himself looking. The dark, brooding eyes were impenetrable, and the mouth was inflexibly on its guard; the whole impression was one of severity. But, nevertheless, invitation was there. Francis knew that he was more than welcome to ask all the questions he chose, and to take his full time about them. There was not the faintest hint of surprise at his request.

For a moment the priest looked back at him. His gaze searched and challenged. Then he turned back toward the church door, and Francis silently followed him.

"You've been quicker than I expected," the priest began, sitting down in a corner of one of the rear pews and motioning Francis to a seat beside him. "I gave you a full month longer."

He laid his arm along the back of the pew, crossed his knees, and smiled so unexpectedly and delightfully that Francis felt as if the sun had suddenly come out on an austere landscape.

"Why!" he cried, dazzled. "How did you—what did you——"

"Know?" supplied the priest. "Oh! we know a good many things here. We learn how to use our eyes."

"I don't know anything," Francis confessed; "not even enough to ask questions. But I want to make a beginning at knowing everything about your church."

For another minute silence returned. The priest did not seem at a loss, but he was evidently taking counsel with his own heart, probably, also, with the altar light which hung at a distance, glowing in the gathering shadows of late afternoon. He gave Francis another searching glance, and Francis met it candidly, opening his eyes wide to show that there were no veils of reserve in them.

"Well," said the priest at last, coming to some inner decision and speaking with a slight stiffening of the line of his mouth, "you might make a beginning by calling it The Church instead of my church. That will put you on the right track to understand it."

Francis's heart sank—not so much at the intellectual significance of the priest's words as at the involuntary effect they had on him. He had wanted to keep his mood humble and open and flexible; and here, at the outset, he felt it stiffen. Perhaps it was the priest's mouth that affected him, or something in the tone of his voice. He was dismayed, and did his best to relax his mind.

"Isn't that the end rather than the beginning?" he asked, speaking carefully. "It's one of the things I want to know: why it is The Church."

The priest, too, was disappointed. He frowned, and the sunless landscape of his face became more severe than ever.

"You Protestants don't pay enough attention to your Bibles," he replied; "or else its truths are too simple for you. 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church.' There you have the whole matter."

"But," began Francis. Then he stopped. He had not come to this interview with any desire for controversy. He hated to feel his mind commencing every answer to the priest with the ungracious conjunction, "but." However, candour seemed to leave him no choice. So, presently, he went on, still speaking carefully.

"How can one know that Christ meant those words to be taken so literally and given just this application. He often spoke vaguely and figuratively."

"Exactly!"

If the priest had been waiting for this very remark, he could not have seized on it more deftly nor have used it to give the conversation a more surprising turn. He swung on it as on a pivot.

"It is because of the occasional vagueness and apparent inconsistency of the gospels that a supreme interpreter is so necessary. The Church fills that office. She decides how our Lord's words are to be taken. She knows, for she is His Body. According to her, the promise to Peter has been literally fulfilled."

Francis felt a little dizzy. The argument had come full circle so quickly that he was astonished to find himself again at the beginning. He choked back his fa-

miliar conjunction, and held his peace for a minute. The priest watched him closely.

"You see," said the latter, more gently, at last, "the first thing you Protestants really need is the last thing you are ready for: humility. You can't realise that to understand the Catholic faith you have, one and all, to go back and become as little children."

"You mean," replied Francis, speaking more carefully than ever and with a note of deprecation, "that we have to begin our study of your—of the Church by taking her word for the truth of everything she says?"

"It amounts to that, yes," assented the priest. "I should think you'd know by this time that you can't get anywhere with your everlasting discussions and proofs, your individual researches and individual creeds. You just go on multiplying sects and filling the world with fruitless dissension. The way to arrive is to march all together. Then the Kingdom will come."

He spoke the last two sentences with a ring that set them apart from all the others. His dark eyes gave forth a sudden lightning flash of longing and purpose. It was evident that he badly wanted the Kingdom to come. But the sternness of his face did not relent.

"It's a difficult business." Francis shook his head. "I suppose you can't understand it. You see, when you haven't been born into Catholicism—when, as a matter of fact, you have been born into something quite different—you simply *have* to be convinced of its truth before you accept it."

The priest remained silent. He held Francis's eyes, probing and searching them more earnestly than ever.

It was apparent that he was again coming to some inner decision.

"I'm going to tell you something," he said at last. "You ought to know it; and the Church has every privilege and authority. When I saw you here at a Benediction four years ago, I knew you for one of us, and I began to inquire about your history. I learned, beyond any shadow of doubt, that you were baptised into the Holy Catholic Church, in Amiens cathedral, the day you were born."

"What!" cried Francis. He felt as if his ears had taken leave of his brain. "I beg your pardon. Will you please say that again?" he stammered helplessly.

The priest repeated his statement; and all the grave landscape basked in the sun, as, smiling, he leaned forward and laid his thin, ecclesiastical looking hand on Francis's arm.

"You see, you *were* born into Catholicism," he said. "You are already a child of the Church."

Francis got to his feet. His one overmastering desire was to find his father. The priest rose with him.

"Wait," he said. "Here's my card. They call me Father Ferguson. And here's a book I want you to read. Come back to me when you have finished it. Come back before, if you want to. Come back any time."

He seemed to understand perfectly that Francis's interest and attention were lost to him for the time being, and he did not try to detain him. But, as he put the book into his hand, he raised two fingers and gravely made the sign of the cross.

Fortunately for Francis, his father was alone in his study that afternoon. He was not working nor reading; he was leaning back in a big chair before the fire, smoking and meditating. He looked up quickly as, after a hasty knock, his son burst in.

"Oh, Francis! you're just—why, boy, what's the matter?"

He sat up and took his pipe out of his mouth, gazing into the eager face that confronted him.

"Father!" Francis's tone was fraught with many emotions: surprise, delight, a curious undercurrent of fear, a dawning revelation. "Father! tell me: was I baptised into the Catholic Church in Amiens cathedral?"

The impetuous question brooked no delay in its answer; but, nevertheless, it had to put up with it. Vincent rose from his chair, laid his pipe aside, and stood looking out of the window for a tensely silent moment. He was trying to think quickly what was the best tone for him to take. But his very hesitation was, of course, in itself, an answer, and Francis's face kindled.

"Yes," came the simple answer at last. Vincent turned from the window and looked his son smilingly in the eyes. "But I needn't tell you," he added, "that the ceremony had no such importance to me as you seem to find in it."

"But—but——" Francis stammered, and stopped. He felt a quick smarting of tears in his eyes which astonished him. "Why did you do it?" he managed finally to articulate.

Vincent resumed his chair and his pipe, deliberately

refilling the latter in an evident effort to preserve a certain lightness of tone.

"Sit down, boy," he said. "We'll have to talk this thing out, and we might as well be comfortable. No; take out those papers, and sit back. There! I wish you hadn't given up smoking; it's such an aid to calmness and sanity. Now: why did I do it? Well, honestly, I suppose I don't just exactly know why."

"But, father!"

Francis seemed in for a whole afternoon of expostulation. He moved back to the edge of his chair, and spoke earnestly.

"You'll try to tell me, won't you? You see what a lot it means to me."

"That's the amazing thing," Vincent answered, contemplating his son with frankly baffled and incredulous eyes. "I see your emotion. You couldn't be more disturbed if you were in love. But, to save my life, I can't understand it; I can't even believe it."

"Well, anyway, it's so," declared Francis. "I do care a very great deal. And now, won't you please tell me about my baptism?"

So Vincent briefly rehearsed the details, dwelling on the casualness of the climax and its entire insignificance in his eyes.

"It tickled my fancy," he said musingly. "I insisted on your being born in Amiens, because I wanted you to open your eyes on something beautiful. Your baptism struck me as being a pretty bit of symbolism."

"But—symbolism!" Francis demurred. "That's

more than pretty, don't you think? I—I have a great respect for symbolism."

"It depends on how you take it," replied Vincent lightly. "It meant only a passing whim with me when I had you baptised. And, that being so, it doesn't seem to me fair that you should take it so seriously."

"Well, tell me more about it, father. We stayed in Amiens two months, didn't we? Did you take me into the cathedral often? Did I hear Mass? Did I hear Benediction?"

Vincent shrugged his shoulders and laughed good-naturedly.

"Hold on! No more questions!" he expostulated. "Since you're really so interested, I'll try to tell you everything I can remember. Then, perhaps, in the future, you'll give me my due and let me keep silent about what really means nothing to me. Is that a bargain?"

Francis nodded. He leaned back in his chair and fixed his father with brilliant eyes, almost ceasing to breathe in his intense concentration on his one opportunity. He was going to hear about what seemed to him the most important period in his life.

To do him justice Vincent told the little story sympathetically. His carelessness could not hold out against the burning eagerness of his auditor. As he talked, Francis saw the dim, soaring aisles of the great cathedral, with the windows glowing through them; he heard the music of Mass and Vespers; he mingled with the worshippers and knew himself at home. When his father had finished and he had sat silent a minute, hop-

ing that some forgotten detail might yet come to mind, he drew a long breath.

"Thank you," he said. "I shall never forget that. Thank you, father."

He rose as he spoke, and the concentration of his eyes changed to an equally marked abstraction. An hour before he had wanted nothing so much as to see his father; now he wanted nothing so much as to get away by himself and fix forever in his memory that which he had just heard. But he was too generous to leave Vincent with no intimation of the nature of the events of the earlier afternoon.

"A priest at Saint Joseph's told me," he said. "A Father Ferguson. He had found out by some sort of enquiry which he didn't explain. He gave me this book to read. Dad, it may interest you to know that I couldn't make much out of what he told me about the Catholic Church."

Vincent nodded.

"All right, boy. I thought not. But go now, and think things over. I guess you've got your mind more than full."

He rose as he spoke and gripped his son's hand. Then he returned to his pipe and his contemplation of the fire.

XI

IT has been hinted that Francis and Eleanor had become somewhat more than friends. From the first the relation between them had been one of such peculiar intimacy that it could hardly have failed to develop into love. But the spontaneity which was so characteristic of everything they did and said together did not carry them on to the natural conclusion which, perhaps, they both of them expected. What was the matter? Francis's face was often as one who awaits an imminent dawn; but Eleanor's was impenetrable.

The brilliancy of the girl's social career filled her friend with a certain awe of admiration. Night after night he found her arrayed in dinner or dancing gown, her dusky hair piled high, pearls at her throat, her slippered feet ready to enter the car at the door.

"Are you going to have such a very good time?" he once asked wistfully.

"I hope so," she answered. "Why don't you come too? They're all just folks, you know."

He shook his head.

"No, they aren't to me. I can't make anything of them in their ballroom setting. I don't know what to talk about."

"That's where you make your mistake," she assured him. "Last night I sat out two dances with a man

whom I had just met; and what do you suppose we were talking about? The Roman Catholic Church! People don't leave their brains and hearts in the pockets of their business suits. They take them to dinners and parties where they can get new ideas for them from other people's brains and hearts. That's what society means: an interchange of ideas."

Francis considered. He did not like the picture of Eleanor sitting out dances and talking about religion with strange men.

"Did you learn much?" he inquired grudgingly.

"No." Her eyes dwelt on him, and she smiled. "I wasn't learning; I was trying to teach what you told me the day you came back from Europe."

But she did not go out every evening; and, when she stayed at home, she and Francis sat before the fire in her sitting-room and read and discussed the book which Fr. Ferguson had loaned.

They were very conscientious about this. Fr. Ferguson was a priest of the Church which had aroused their interest, and surely he must know what the Church considered important. Moreover, the author of the book spoke with a note of authority which was corroborated by the string of capital letters after his highly right reverend name on the title page. There was no doubt that the two young Protestants had before them the essentials of the Roman Catholic faith. But, to their disappointment, the arguments were so uninteresting to them that their convincingness seemed aside from the point.

"Goodness! what in the world does it matter whether

the Pope is infallible or not?" Eleanor protested. "Only God can know that, and He's not going to tell. Our business is to listen and learn what He has to tell us privately about our own fallibility. As for Peter and his rock, he bores me to death. It isn't fair to make so much of a mere play on words. What if Christ did think him the chief apostle? He had no more authority than the rest. Seems to me I remember, from what I have read of the Bible, that it was Paul—no apostle at all—who did more than any one else for the Early Church."

"What I don't like," said Francis in turn, "is the setting aside all the denominations. I'm a Congregationalist, you know—not a very good one, perhaps, but my mother is. It vexes me to be told that my creed is artificial. It's no such thing!"

His voice vibrated with an unusual note of indignation, and presently he and Eleanor looked at each other and laughed.

"How we are talking!" she commented. "This unfortunate book seems to call forth our worst instead of our best traits. It makes me frivolous, and it makes you huffy. Whereas——"

She broke off, and both their faces fell into sober, thoughtful lines, as they remembered with what an exalted expectation they had begun their reading.

"Isn't there anything at all about the spiritual side of the matter?" she asked, leaning to look at the volume on Francis's knee.

"No, I'm afraid not." He shook his head, turning the pages. "Only chapters about the Real Presence,

about Indulgences, about the necessity of Confession and Absolution, about the Infallibility of the Pope, about the Church Councils (their decrees seem to be final), about the Immaculate Conception."

"Do you suppose a Catholic *has* to believe everything in this definite, clear-cut way?" Eleanor pondered. "Let's go and ask. I'll meet you at Saint Joseph's tomorrow at four o'clock."

Fr. Ferguson's sombre eyes kindled obscurely as they rested on Eleanor's face.

"I hoped he would bring you this time," he remarked.

But Eleanor took no part in the ensuing conversation. She preferred to sit in the pew behind the two men and listen to them.

Yes, it was true: a Catholic must accept and believe the cardinal doctrines of his Church. How could he, if they did not convince him? By a simple act of will.

"It's through your vagueness that you Protestants have lost your way," the priest explained. "You aren't willing to commit yourselves to anything, so nothing does you any good. If you want to find your way back, you must stop just where you are and turn around. Any one can do that—if he isn't too obstinate."

"We don't want to find our way back," objected Francis, his eyes alight with their old visionary gleam. "We want to find it on."

"Well, sometimes the only way to do that is to begin by going back," said Fr. Ferguson. "You can certainly find your way on if you come with us."

"Not otherwise?"

The priest hesitated.

"The ways of the Lord are infinite," he answered reverently at last; "but so are those of the devil. If you want to be sure, you must march with us."

At the word "march," his voice rang out and he threw his head back. Francis remembered his similar enthusiasm of a few days before, and looked at him sympathetically. Whatever might be this man's limitations, or those of his creed, it spoke well for them both that such a fervent loyalty should exist between them. Was there anything in life which could quite take the place of such a zeal of devotion?

"I suppose it's pretty much this way," the priest went on after a moment: "to those who have never known the Catholic faith, God is lenient. But of those who have heard its call, He exacts obedience. You and this young lady are now bound to make an eventual submission."

There was something immitigable about the mild, inflexible finality with which he brought out this statement, offering it as an indubitable matter of fact. Francis and Eleanor looked at each other. Their Protestant blood revolted.

"What if we can't?" said the former quickly.

Then he was sorry; for the note of rebellion in his voice made the priest's face very bleak.

"When people can't do what they must, they have to be disciplined," he answered.

Francis was silent. He had never felt so miserably baffled. Two forces within him tugged against each other with equal persuasiveness. The one informed

him curtly that it was quite impossible for him to take a step without full conviction; the other whispered that it was just as impossible for him to abandon his pearl of great price. He must come, he could not come; what was he going to do? He could not even see his position clearly enough to define it any further to Fr. Ferguson. He knew that a wall was before him, but he was quite unable to point it out.

An old woman solved his immediate perplexity for him by entering the door of the church and hovering just within the threshold, evidently wanting to speak to Fr. Ferguson but hesitating to interrupt him. The pastoral eye of the priest noticed her; and, impartially vigilant over his flock, he rose to give her her turn at conference.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but there's some one who needs me. I must go. I'll send you another book. Don't be discouraged. All big things take time. They have to dig their foundations deep. And you must always remember that digging hurts. Pray without ceasing. You may be sure that I pray constantly for you. I bear"—he paused, and his sudden, transfiguring smile illuminated his face—"I bear you on my heart day and night," he concluded on a new, deep note of tenderness.

Then he lifted his hand in benediction, and turned away.

Francis and Eleanor did not move. The priest's departure left them sitting very close together, though in different pews. He was leaning back, and she was leaning forward, with her arms on the back of his pew and her head not far from his. All lovers know the thrill

that lurks in such fettered nearness. It was infinitely sweet to them both to feel their spirits flow back into mutual harmony. They had been distressed and distraught; but now they were at peace. The altar light shone reassuringly at them. In spite of everything, all must yet be well. For several minutes they said nothing; though neither had ever found the other's speech more satisfactory.

"Francis," Eleanor began then shyly, almost hesitatingly, "I suppose you pray?"

She looked, not at him, but at the altar light.

A faint flush rose in Francis's cheek, and he also hesitated. His Protestant reticence gave him a moment of difficulty.

"Yes," he answered simply at last, turning to look at her.

"Well, how do you do it?"

Her voice was low, and she still avoided his eyes.

"I know that's an intimate question," she went on immediately. "Perhaps it's quite unpardonable. But it's one of the things I want desperately to find out, and you are the person to tell me."

The last words brought her eyes back for an instant, and she gave him a wide, full gaze—serious and searching. Then she looked away again and waited.

The appeal roused in Francis the elder brotherhood which was coming to be more and more recognised as an element in his affection for this woman; and he turned fully towards her, with, for a wonder, no tinge of reluctance in his manner. Instead, for the first time, he felt and expressed the peculiar joy of the priest.

"It isn't quite easy," he began, trying to give himself a chance to hunt for words and, at the same time, to explain his hesitation. "I've never been asked the question before; I've never thought much about it; in fact, it isn't very long since I began to pray. Perhaps, on the whole, I'd better tell you just what happened to me."

Once more she looked at him. "Do you want to? Isn't it asking too much?" her eyes demurred. "Aren't you my dearest friend? Don't I love you?" his eyes replied.

"Of course my mother taught me to pray," he said slowly, mastering a catch in his voice. "'Now I lay me,' and the Lord's Prayer, and 'God bless Francis and make him a good boy.' But that didn't help me much when I grew up. It was a mere routine. As soon as my mother stopped putting me to bed, I dropped the habit. The prayers in church weren't any better. Sometimes they rather shocked me, they were so familiar and conversational. Every Sunday morning the pulpit gave Heaven its orders for the week. I made up my mind that the whole business of praying was a mistake. Either there was a God, and He was immanent, and knew our thoughts already better than we could know them; or there wasn't any God, and praying was a waste of time.

"And then—but you know what happened. You and the Grail and the Catholic Church and the beauty of the world conspired to make me feel that, though I was perfectly sure of God, the fact of His immanence did

not give quite nearness enough. I wanted to do something on my side to get a little closer."

"Yes," breathed Eleanor.

"I tried to resume my evening prayers; but the old formulas didn't work—not even the Lord's Prayer. I tried to make new ones; but they were stiff and formal. I felt pretty badly about it.

"Then, one day"—he paused and drew a long breath—"it was the day my father found me here. I hadn't expected to come in at all; but, as I stood outside, something drew me, and, before I knew it, I found myself on my knees, there, in the aisle. I wish I could tell you exactly what happened. I seemed to let myself go like an arrow from a bowstring. I think I said nothing but 'God—God—God'; but that was enough. I was praying hard."

His voice dropped into silence, as if, in spite of his priestly solicitude, he had, for the instant, forgotten his auditor; and he sat, reviewing and pondering the mystic experience. When he at last looked up again, he was concerned to find that Eleanor was crying. All her shyness had disappeared in the flood of her desire.

"Eleanor!"

He put his hand on hers and at once took it away. The priest and the lover struggled together in his eyes.

"Oh!" she explained in a broken voice. "That was so beautiful. I wish it would happen to me."

The priest made a valiant effort and succeeded in prevailing over the lover, though he could not conquer him. In the note of authority on which he presently

spoke, there were all sorts of under and over tones of tenderness.

"But it will, dear; it will happen. It can't fail. You have only to want it enough, and to let yourself go. It's really quite simple and easy because it's so natural. Don't make it hard by thinking it's hard. Just let yourself go."

His face yearned over her.

"Well"—she checked her tears as suddenly as she had given way to them, and looked up with a stormy sort of smile beating its way through her eyes, "thank you. I wish Fr. Ferguson could have heard you. He might have learned the difference between real things and infallible humbug. You ought to be a priest."

Something in her tone brought a new look into Francis's eyes, a look in which the lover mightily prevailed. But it was an unhappy lover, sternly dismayed.

"No!" he cried sharply. He stopped and caught both her hands in his, pressing them to his face. "No, Eleanor!"

The change in him was so sudden that it startled her. She looked up and searched his eyes. Her own eyes wavered and she turned a little pale. Then, resolutely, she pulled her hands away.

"Please go away, dear," she said gently. "I want to be alone here for awhile."

She glanced toward the altar light, and it was impossible for him not to interpret her meaning. Once more the lover and priest were at grapples; but this time they both won, the lover proving his worthiness by a selfless

joy in the spiritual satisfaction of his beloved. Without another word, he left her.

But, as he went down the steps of the church, he said again sharply, under his breath, "No! Oh, no!"

XII

BY the end of the winter term Francis had decided that he might as well give up the study of philosophy. He was doing poorer and poorer work, he was losing the respect and affection of the head of the department, he was endangering his own self-respect, he was mortifying his father. No Merwin had ever made such a poor showing along intellectual lines. He was not ashamed, for he knew his reasons; but he understood that every one who liked him was ashamed for him.

His final relinquishment did not, of course, help matters in the eyes of his little world. His father, to whom he first confided his intention, was gravely annoyed.

"That's not the way out, son," he said "to give up. You have set your hand to this work. Can't you pluck up a manly resolution and put the thing through?"

Francis flushed. Then he remembered how much he and his father loved each other, and he steadied his voice to explain for the twentieth time:

"But I've changed; I can't help it. Most of the systems of philosophy no longer interest me. It's absurd to go on with a work which seems to you a waste of time."

"A waste of time! Boy, do you know how that

sounds?" Vincent looked at his son with a glance of rebuke and amusement and mortification which stung and rankled. "Don't say such things—even to me," he concluded seriously.

"Father!" Francis felt the despair of a hopeless situation, but he held his ground. "I'm ready to say it to all the world, since it is the truth."

"How about your real interests, then?" Vincent inquired caustically: "all these profound theological books, these defences of dogma, these explanations of miracles, that I see scattered about your room? Are they not a waste of time?"

"Yes," agreed Francis, so unexpectedly that his father's surprised face became a study; "they are. But I had to work my way through them in order to know that they are."

"You're not very consistent," Vincent commented—

"I'm too much in earnest to be consistent," Francis broke in.

"But that doesn't matter if you have really come to the end of those ridiculous books. I congratulate you. It has distressed me to have them in the house."

"Well," said Francis, "I tell you, father, it's great to get on the track of something which interests you so much that you don't care through what channels it drags you. A year ago, of course, I should have despised those books; but now, I'd read 'The Duchess' on my knees if I thought she could give me any light."

Vincent did not respond to his son's flashing, ingenuous smile. His face grew still more troubled.

"That's it," he remarked. "A superstition disintegrates the whole mind, so that one no longer knows brass from gold. You ought to be able to tell at a glance that such books can't help you."

Francis said nothing further. He did not want to suggest, or even to admit to himself, that his present humility was preferable to the pride of intellect which he had once shared with his father; but he felt all through him the glow of its infinite promise. When one is willing to look everywhere for truth, one stands in a fair way to stumble on her. He put his hand in his pocket and smilingly touched a book on the wonders of Lourdes which he was about to return to Fr. Ferguson.

Nevertheless, the fact remained that none of the books had helped him. They had involved him in endless, elaborate speculations; they had set him ransacking the college library for histories of the Early Church; they had challenged him to read and re-read his Bible, and to learn all he could about the original texts of the gospels. Volumes of "Higher Criticism" lay cheek by jowl on his study table with the writings of the Fathers. He had learned in detail what he had long since understood in the large: that the absolutely authentic words of Christ are comparatively few. Historically, it is much to be doubted whether He ever said, "Thou art Peter."

All these things had confused him, without seeming, any of them, to matter seriously. He wrestled with them because Fr. Ferguson had told him that he must. They were external, they did not touch the heart of his

interest; they gave him an oppressive conception of the Catholic Church as a huge machine, skilfully put together by various Fathers and Councils, and in nowise to be tampered with lest it break down. The requirements and precautions made him uneasy. He wanted a Church that could be handled roughly. Again and again he dropped his books and harked back to his first thrilling conception of the Church as a symbol of the Incarnation, a visible reassurance of the divinity of the world. That idea was impregnable. It was so simple and vast that there was no getting outside it to scrutinise it and see whether its parts all hung together. It had no parts; it was a unity. Repeatedly, he went and asked Fr. Ferguson whether it were not sufficient in itself.

But the priest never met him with the full response which, each time, Francis could not help expecting of him.

"The Incarnation—yes, that is the point. But not in any vague, pantheistic sense, such as you seem to me to intend. An explicit, historic Incarnation, once for all; an Atonement by One for the sins of the world; a deliberate handing on of the power to an organised Church; an inspired formation of dogma which is authoritative. These things are of first importance; they must be accepted."

"So that the Incarnation, instead of refining matter to spirit," Francis replied once impulsively, "has piled up more matter about it."

The priest frowned.

"The very term 'Incarnation' implies matter," he answered.

Realising as never before how strong was his Protestant heritage of reasonableness, Francis continued faithful to his attendance at the Congregational Church, of which he was a member. Sometimes he entered its calm portals with a throbbing sense of relief; here was where he belonged. On such occasions he slipped to his knees beside his mother in the magenta-cushioned pew, and hid his face in his hands, and prayed earnestly. But when he rose (the space between the pews was so narrow that he had to struggle up), his mother always looked at him with such a curiously mingled expression of concern and embarrassment that his ardour of worship was cooled by amusement, and he took the rest of his prayers sitting.

He never failed to try to interpret the order of service by the key which had so magically unlocked for him the Catholic Mass. Surely, since both churches were Christian, their purposes must be the same. But, with all the desire and will in the world, he could not find the Incarnation at the heart of the Congregational service. It was goodwill and brotherhood, morality, progress and efficiency that he found—excellent, admirable things, but not of the essence of the first commandment. They stimulated thought rather than love; and it was not thought but worship that he wanted in church. He missed the thrilling, poignant touch of the mystical consummation of the Mass. Doubtless, God's spirit flowed through and through those impassive figures, erect in their pews, with their eyes on their frock-

coated pastor; but they certainly did not look as if they were worshipping Him. Francis tried to make allowance for habit and temperamental reserve; but came to the conclusion that, granted any leeway of expression beyond a Quaker immobility, the intention which prompts the expression must reveal itself. So that, if the Congregational service did not bring out the idea of the Incarnation, it must be because it did not want to do so.

Once in a while he tried to question his mother, but never got very far. As the Catholic priest had too much to say, so she had too little. This might have been, partly, he told himself, because she was not naturally of an enquiring mind; but he felt that it was also because her creed did not challenge her to enquiry. She accepted it passively, ready-made, and kept it intact as a matter of course. It meant everything to her, she would unhesitatingly have died for it; but she did not really understand it very well.

"The Communion service? That is the memorial which our Lord hath commanded us to make," she replied rather guardedly, as if she did not quite like to discuss the matter. "Oh, no; I think it suggests the Atonement rather than the Incarnation. Christmas is the time for the Incarnation. Our divinity? Francis, we are poor fallen creatures, we are not divine. Christ is divine for us."

Thus he had it from one side and from the other: God still outside His universe, historical events and the machinery of organisation still of the utmost, the only importance, spirit still cumbered and buried.

Whither should he turn? To Eleanor. She was his constant companion; to her alone he could talk and be understood.

And yet he found that he did not, in turn, always understand her, during these weeks of stress. Her state of mind was no longer single. There even seemed to be something in her that refused to be sorry about their disappointment in the Catholic Church. Once, when they stood together on the top of a windy hill, and he concluded a long argument with the sober statement, "I'm afraid it's no use; I'm a hopeless Protestant," she startled him by lifting her arms above her head and giving a ringing cry.

"You're not glad, Eleanor?" he said incredulously, looking into her transfigured face.

Then, suddenly, his blood tingled in his veins and his breath came short. He took a quick step towards her.

But it was too late. Her arms dropped, and she drew away.

"No, I'm deeply sorry," she answered. "Only—I don't believe it."

She would not let him stop going to Saint Joseph's, and many a Benediction they heard there together.

"Incredible that it means so much more than it seems to!" Francis remarked frequently, as, rapt and reverent, they came away. "I always forget that I'm not at liberty to interpret it as simply and satisfactorily as I please. It's entirely beautiful, utterly right, until they who certainly know it best begin to talk about it."

"Then it's impossible?" Eleanor said.

"Impossible," he echoed, after a moment.

Meantime, a strange sort of friendship developed between Fr. Ferguson and the two young Protestants. He was unrelentingly stern with them. In their long conversations in the rear pews of Saint Joseph's he made no concessions to their desire for tolerance.

"Tolerance is one of the cleverest modern tools of the devil," he said. "A man can't be tolerant and care greatly about what he says he believes. If a thing is true, it is true for all times and for all men; and that which contradicts it can't help being false."

But, with all his rigidity, it was apparent that his heart yearned burningly over his new friends. There was sometimes a light in his dark eyes, glowing among the shadows of the church, which made Francis put out his hand; and once Eleanor slipped to her knees and murmured, "Bless me, father." He called them "my children," "my son" and "my daughter," and his utmost sternness always held a note of tenderness.

"I really love him, Francis," said Eleanor one day. "It begins to make me feel very unhappy to go on arguing and disagreeing with him. I immensely admire his steadfastness. He's like an unwavering lighthouse, burning, burning—how he does burn! I feel like a smoky candle beside him, blowing every which way in the wind."

"Yes, but," suggested Francis slowly, "the wind is a natural servant of God, while the lighthouse is highly artificial. I think I'd rather blow free in the one than be pent up in the other."

"Even if you blow out?"

Francis shook his head.

"I guess it's time to drop that metaphor," he answered.

When, towards the end of May, they told Fr. Ferguson that they were going away for the summer, the priest bent his head.

"Will you come back to me?" he asked, suddenly flashing a glance at them from under his thick, dark brows. There was in his voice a proudly humble appeal.

Francis hesitated. The glance had been directed particularly at him.

"I don't know, father," he began. Then a sudden crisis took place in his mind, and he sat up straighter and spoke more rapidly. "I think it's rather shameful how we have kept you talking and listening while we have dallied. You have been endlessly patient with us. We are very grateful and sorry. But we can't go on this way forever. It's a cruel waste of your time, and the indecision is bad for us. Perhaps we'd better say"—he broke off, for the eyes into which he was speaking became almost too much for him—"perhaps we'd better say that, unless something happens to change us, we will not reopen the subject."

He concluded as gently as possible, and his own eyes pleaded for forgiveness; but he knew and saw that he was dealing a blow.

Fr. Ferguson lowered his gaze and sat for a moment in silence. He hung his head.

"God forgive me!" he murmured at last. "I have failed; I have been unworthy of my trust."

His accent was one of such sorrow and such bitter self-reproach that Eleanor started forward from the corner of the pew.

"No, father!" she cried. "It wasn't your fault. You couldn't help it. You did your very best."

"But I failed. And now what is to become of your poor, beautiful souls? Oh, children!"

Imploringly the priest stretched out his hands, and there were tears in the eyes that yearned over them. Eleanor could hardly stand it. She caught one of the pleading hands in both of hers and held it close, cherishing it with all the comfort which her womanhood knew how to dispense.

"Never mind," she said. "We are young yet. Perhaps"—but Francis's face warned her to be honest—"perhaps you will go on praying for us," she concluded rather weakly.

"Praying for you!" Fr. Ferguson gathered his black cassock about his knees and, with the action, seemed to recover his self-control. He stood up in the dusky pew, and once more his eyes burned like tapers. "I shall pray for you constantly. I shall inflict heavy chastisement on myself for having failed to present the claims of the Church in all their irresistible allurements. You could not hold back if you once understood; and it was my business to see that you did understand. I shall burn candles day and night for you; I shall offer frequent novenas. I shall leave nothing undone; I shall try to move heaven and earth. You must come sometime, and I shall run to kiss the feet of the man who is found worthy to bring you. My children? No, you

are not mine. I was unable to bear you. God have mercy upon me, and bless you and save you in His own good time."

He started to lift his hand over them in priestly benediction; then shook his head shamefacedly and turned away. They watched him go up the aisle and pause to prostrate himself before the Sacrament; but, as they did not see him rise, they averted their following gaze, and softly slid out of the church and down the steps.

Neither of them spoke for a block or two. Eleanor was frankly crying. Francis took her hand and pulled it within his arm, where it clung.

"We couldn't help it," he said at last. "He did his best, and we did our best. We are none of us to blame."

"But it's been awful," sobbed Eleanor.

"Yes," he assented gravely.

"So far as I'm concerned, however," she went on brokenly, "I wouldn't have missed one phase of the experience. It's been wonderful to come within range of an interest which makes people care so much. See how we've given ourselves to it, you and I. See how Fr. Ferguson—oh, poor man! do you suppose he will scourge and starve himself?" Her voice shook. "But imagine any one else whom we know caring so much about his religion that he would be broken hearted by his failure to convert us! I feel as if I had been in a divine volcano."

"Eleanor!" Francis gave her time to recover from the effect of her own little eruption; then he challenged

her soberly. "Does all this mean that you've given up?"

She stopped quivering. Her hand ceased to clutch his arm. She looked up at him.

"That depends upon you, Francis."

XIII

BUT when they were out in the country they both felt and acknowledged a genuine sense of relief.

By this time their respective families had summer homes in the Vermont valley which they so dearly loved, and they felt that they completely belonged to the spot. Its spell had deepened upon them with the passing of the years and the enriching accumulation of their experience so that the mountains and brooks were now eloquent to them of a thousand things. "How good to be back! Oh, how good to be back!" they went exclaiming to each other through the radiant early June days.

It was partly a healthy reaction that caused their light-heartedness. They had held themselves too long and too steadily to a laborious effort not to rebound into carelessness when the tension was relieved. But there was more in their summer mood than the mere swing of the pendulum.

Eleanor had felt it first. She had preceded her father and friends in her return to Vermont, coming up alone in order that she might open her house; and when Francis followed her, he recognised a transformation in her. He had written her of the day and the hour of his arrival, and half expected to see her waiting for him at the station. But she was not there, nor was she at her

home, nor anywhere in the village. He had to track her painstakingly; and it was only after an hour or two that he found her, high on a hillside, among wild rose bushes and wild strawberries. She wore a white dress and a white hat with a rose coloured scarf around it; and her hands were full of flowers. He had never seen her look so beautiful.

She was certainly not waiting for him, yet neither was she unaware of his approach. When he leaped the bars at the foot of her hill, far below him, she climbed on a rock and waved her hand to him; but, when he reached the rock, she was not there, and again he had to hunt for her. His heart beat quickly, as he caught the glint of her dress among some bushes and ran after her. When he found her, however, he stood still and gazed at her silently. Could a separation of a week or two have sufficed to make him forget how lovely she was? She gazed back at him, laughing; and then she came and put her flowers into his hands.

"Be careful; they prick. But just smell them, and smell the strawberries."

As he bent his head to them, he kissed them covertly.

During the rest of that June afternoon they sat or strolled on the hillside, not saying much but tasting a new wine of fellowship. Their eyes were the inexhaustible cups from which they drank. No thrush's song could rival the sweetness of the silences which fell between them. Once in a while their hands or arms touched, and then there was a hush within a hush.

Francis did not analyse the change which had come over Eleanor, but he understood it. She had emerged

from her long religious preoccupation, and, reverting to a period before he had known her, had recovered a veritably Pagan mood. Her winter garment had not been one of repentance so much as of sober investigation and challenge, of spiritual enquiry. But she had at last had enough of it, and had flung it from her into the fires of spring. She was another creature now, given over to the beauty of the world, to the free play of her senses, to the glory of the passing hour, and, to—love. Yes, he knew that she was given over to love, but he also knew that it was not time for him to recognise this. As she waited, so he waited also behind his betraying eyes. The thing which he did not understand was the connection between the flinging aside of the garment and the thrilling freedom which he now felt with her. They had often been as close to each other under the folds of the winter garment as they were now on the summer hillside. Their spirits had touched and mingled in Mass and Benediction. But never before had he felt at liberty to touch her hand.

The summer season on which they thus entered together proved to be unusually beautiful. Seldom had the woods been so green, or the brooks so full, or the sky visited by such troops of marching clouds. The hills laughed and dreamed, the meadows rejoiced, the rain came in the night and passed off, singing, in the dawn. Now and then a great thunder storm rolled majestically among the mountain peaks. Francis and Eleanor were out all day long, and day after day. Their little world of friends and relatives took it for granted that they belonged to each other, and they

profited tacitly by the assumption. They climbed every mountain, explored every hollow, and followed almost every brook up to its source.

Vincent was delighted. A great load rolled from his shoulders when Francis and Eleanor came down the hill together on that first June afternoon, and he strolled out to meet them. There was no mistaking the meaning of the look in their eyes. He made no faintest hint of a comment; but he lent himself pleasantly to all his son's ensuing absences, and even ignored the pile of philosophy books which he himself had brought up from Bridgehaven, hoping that a lapsed interest might return and lost ground be recovered.

"Never mind, Jane," he told his wife. "If Eleanor Ramsey marries him, she will save him from everything."

"But didn't she use to go to Saint Joseph's with him?" Jane demurred.

"All the better! She's tried the thing out, seen the absurdity of it, and now she's immune."

Eleanor's father was not quite so complaisant when he came back from one of his frequent business trips and saw what was going on. He had encountered Francis a score of times during the winter, and had done his best to like him, but had not succeeded. His failure had not troubled him, however, for he had not supposed that his daughter would seriously care for the young man. She had too many other lovers who met her on more sides of her nature. But when he arrived in Vermont and saw the girl's transfigured face, he was abruptly enlightened. His worldly wisdom prevented

him from uttering the drastic protest which rose to his lips. He simply took prompt occasion to stroll over to the Merwin cottage. He and Vincent had always been on the best of terms.

"My boy's not in your way?" said the latter with a whimsical significance, when his caller had gone the rounds of his garden with him.

"I guess not," answered Ramsey. "He certainly doesn't seem to be in Eleanor's way."

"His mother says he's a good boy," Vincent continued.

"Exactly! I have at times found him too good," was Ramsey's frank reply.

"Well"—Vincent considered, with his head on one side, watching the smoke from his pipe—"he's my son, too, you know. Doesn't that fact encourage you?"

Ramsey laughed.

"It does," he admitted. "And I believe some sort of a change has come over him lately. He looks more human."

"Oh! he's human enough," Vincent declared. "You wait!"

"That's what we've all got to do," said the other father, a little ruefully. "I wonder how long."

Perhaps Francis wondered as much himself, as the summer days passed into weeks, into months; and he and Eleanor, constantly together, repeatedly reading their love in each other's eyes, still made no confession. The stress went out of the year, the peace of approaching autumn folded the hills and the mown fields. The flowers and fruit trees had arrived at what they were

waiting for, their consummation; so had the birds and the grass. What was the matter with the human flower that it delayed its unfolding?

But there was one hillside flower, perhaps the rarest of all the year, that reserved its blooming; and, in his expectation of this, Francis felt a thrilling sense of companionship. When he should find the first fringed gentian, then he would speak.

Meantime, it was very sweet to wander beside his dearly beloved, with their all but acknowledged secret vibrating between them. Sometimes the burden of it was so heavy that it made them dumb and a little faint. Their eyelids drooped over their clouded eyes, and their hands were shy of touching. At other times an exhilaration took possession of them and ran through their veins like fire. Then they held their heads high, and talked fast about all kinds of things. In any and every mood they understood and responded to each other like eddies of the same brook.

When they were talkative they discussed their interest of the past winter, and maturely decided that they had finished with it.

"It's not for us. Right or wrong, fortunate or unfortunate, history has made us Protestants, and we can't go back of our heritage."

"Do you suppose we shall miss it?"

"I don't know." Francis considered. "Just now, I can't imagine missing anything. But——"

He paused.

"Well," Eleanor prompted. "But——"

He passed his hand over his forehead and laughed, with a sudden access of exhilaration.

"There aren't any 'buts,'" he declared. "There's only one great 'therefore.'"

September came, with its cool nights, its restless flocks of foregathering birds, its streaks and dashes of crimson in the summer green; and the gentian buds on the hillside were near opening. Francis had chosen one particular meadow wherein to watch for the indication of the ripeness of his time; it was his clock of love. Morning after morning he climbed to it—early, before Eleanor was out—and took counsel with the expanding buds: could he speak to-day? They held him back for a full week after he seemed to be brimmingly ready—a poignantly sweet week of revelation only just withheld. Finally, in the dawn of the most beautiful day of the seven, in the dew-wet grass, under a tender blue sky, he found an azure cup open wide, and all the bells of fate chimed his hour. With a rock for an altar, he knelt and thanked Heaven. Then he sped back to the valley to find Eleanor.

She was up and out. No, she had not had breakfast. Yes, of course, she would come and have it with him on the hillside; that would be lots of fun. A basket was soon packed (no need to take fruit, there were plenty of late blackberries), and the two friends were soon on their way up the shimmering hillside, the sun striking the dew into jewels about their feet, and a song-sparrow singing his hauntingly sweet autumn melody on a bush of prairie-weed.

It was an unforgettable walk, an experience destined

to shine transcendently in both memories. The door was wide open; they stood on the threshold, and could look through into the promised land, the whole length and breadth of it lying just before their feet. Yet they did not enter. They still waited, delayed; and, in the delay, was a realisation, a spiritual consummation which was sheer ecstasy. They did not talk, they did not even look at each other. They were careful to keep their hands from touching.

"I've something to show you," said Francis at length, in a carefully measured voice, as they approached the meadow.

"I thought so," choked Eleanor. "You had a look of discovery when you came for me."

"Shall I let you find it?"

"No; show me."

She closed her eyes and held out her hand.

It was a cold hand, but its touch sent flame darting through him. He also closed his eyes for a moment and caught his breath. Fortunately, the distance was short from the meadow bars to the rock by which the gentian nestled.

"Now!" he said brokenly. "At your feet."

He released her hand.

Had she too been aware of the sign? Had she been watching and waiting for it? Or was it simply because of the immediate oneness of their spirits that she so instantly understood what the gentian meant to them? She gazed down into its deep blue cup—earth giving heaven back to itself—then she looked up into her lover's eyes and gave herself to him.

The breakfast which they had brought with them had to rename itself luncheon before it could get itself eaten. The sun was high, the dew was quite gone, the meadow was astir with the song and motions of crickets, the hills across the valley were basking in sunlight and receiving their usual troops of cloud-shadow visitors, when the lovers at last became aware of the golden progress of the hours. Returning consciousness found them sitting, hand in hand, beside the little blue torch of love which had signalled them. There were traces of tears in both pairs of eyes, and their lips had a sealed, holy look.

But when they began to make preparations for the first meal of their common life, they began also to talk—little by little feeling their way out of the silence which had enfolded them. They seemed to have nothing and yet everything to say.

"I've loved you since the night of the Grail," Francis remarked, as he rolled some stones together for a fire-place and gathered some sticks.

"So have I," Eleanor nodded, unpacking the luncheon basket.

"Why do you suppose we have been so slow?"

"Well, partly because the time wasn't ripe. Partly because"—she looked up thoughtfully at her lover—"I tried to hold things back a little last winter," she confessed.

"Did you?" He swung the kettle over the flames, and came back to sit beside her while the coffee boiled. "Do you feel like telling me why?"

"Yes." She let him gather her hand into his. "It

was the Catholic Church. I knew that if you went into that you would be a priest."

"Eleanor!"

There was a note of such sombre dismay in his voice that a shadow seemed to pass over the meadow, dimming even the gentian torch. He caught her other hand too, and held them both against his breast.

"You wouldn't have sacrificed our love!"

"Yes, I would," she replied, resisting the influence which drew her bodily to his heart. "At least, I would have sacrificed this expression of it. But of course the sacrifice would have been a supreme act of love."

"Eleanor! Eleanor!" He overcame her resistance, and folded her closely. "I can't bear to think of it. Promise me that you will never let anything come between us again."

She yielded and laid her head on his breast. But she did not give the promise which he seemed to take for granted. The coffee kettle prevented her by boiling over.

It was a sacramental meal which they ate on the hillside, sitting side by side, drinking out of the same cup, dividing their sandwiches. Each gathered for the other handfuls of blackberries from the surrounding bushes. All their most homely, ordinary actions seemed fraught with a solemn significance.

When they returned to their homes in the late afternoon their parents had only to glance at their faces to tell what had happened.

XIV

IT is surprising what an entire revelation sunrise is, after all. The dawn gives such explicit promise of it, makes such a long preparation, that the watcher would seem to know exactly what to expect. But the sun-flooded meadows are brighter than the most radiant prophecy of the morning star. Francis and Eleanor were as dazzled by the dayspring of their love as if they had not watched it coming for many weeks and months.

They could hardly be said to give themselves to it and to each other more completely than they had done all summer, for that was impossible; but the new element of awareness and purpose in their intercourse made it a different thing. Their silences were more bravely ecstatic, and their conversations were longer and more intimate. Without any reserve, they opened their hearts to each other and read what was written there.

This did not mean that they always liked what they offered and read. Francis was promptly disturbed by what might be called a baffling interlineation in Eleanor's fair script. He did not understand this; and, for awhile, he lacked words with which to question her about it. On the very morning after their betrothal, when she had run out to meet him in the dew, and he had caught her to him, she had pulled herself back, held him off at arm's length, and gazed so searchingly and

doubtfully into his face that he had been half frightened.

"What's the matter, sweetheart?" he had cried. "Don't you love me any more? Has anything gone wrong?"

She had shaken her head then, and smiled and sighed.

"Of course I love you," she had answered. "And nothing has gone wrong. I guess I was only trying to read a sign."

What sign? Whose sign? He had put his hand to his forehead, as if, like Cain—though he hoped with a difference!—he might find something written there which he could not see. Then she had smiled again and kissed him solemnly.

In the matter of their plans for the future, which of course he wanted at once to discuss, he found a disconcerting hesitation of response on her part. He was all for returning to the study of philosophy.

"I'm sure I can do two years' work in one. That will give me my degree next June. Then, if I can find a teaching position, we can be married in the fall, a year from now."

His eyes burned on her so tenderly that her own eyes could not fail to kindle from them.

"But, Francis," she demurred reluctantly, "you've lost interest in philosophy. How are you going to recover it?"

"I've recovered it already," he answered. "This has given it back to me."

He stooped and kissed the fourth finger of her left hand.

To his dismay, perhaps also to hers, she pulled her hand almost sharply away.

"No!" she cried. "Oh! that won't do at all. It's just what I feared. Don't you see that your work must come first with you, and your love be secondary?"

"No, indeed, I don't see that!" he protested. But, as he continued to gaze at her, his eyes clouded and fell. He knew that, whether he saw it or not, it was certainly so. He hated the truth of it.

He got out the philosophy books which his father had brought up from Bridgehaven, and applied himself to them with a dogged determination to become interested. But of course his preoccupation with his love made that impossible. It was only mechanically and under the lash of his will that he managed to recover the ground which he had lost during the spring term.

It was now not the Catholic Church but Eleanor who made all prying into the nature and causes of things seem a futile waste of time.

Was love not everything? Did it not explain all beauty, all the hovering, vanishing significance of the visible world? What symbol of the divine indwelling did one want beyond the fathomless depth of two dear grey eyes, beyond the holy, eclipsing touch of two sealing lips? Eleanor's presence set the strings of divinity ringing in her lover's heart. He worshipped her very sincerely; and reverently thought no harm to compare her with the Catholic Mass.

His father's restored favour was another element in his new experience that made him very happy. When he came home, in the evening of the gentian day, and,

finding his father waiting for him by the gate, said simply, "Father, she's going to marry me," his overflowing heart was obliged to enlarge itself to receive yet another measure of gladness. For the quick handclasp, the "Oh, son, I'm glad!" made him realise how he had missed his father's sympathy and what it meant to him to recover it.

Jane was less outspoken. She did not know Eleanor very well; but the girl's Unitarian bringing up pulled the mother's heart in one direction of doubt, while her recent frequenting of Saint Joseph's distracted her in the other. Was such a diversely dangerous woman a safe comrade for her son? She made no critical comment, however; and the next day she went with her husband to welcome and embrace their prospective daughter-in-law. Eleanor tried to propitiate her by natural loving-kindness, and succeeded as well as she could have hoped to succeed with one who was not used to the endearments of her own sex. Francis thought he had never seen a more touchingly humorous sight than that of his mother stiffly and awkwardly receiving the caresses of Eleanor, not knowing how to respond to them, but flushing with embarrassed pleasure.

As for Eleanor's father, he made gallant haste to rise to the occasion.

"Yes, you can have her," he said. "Only don't take too good care of her. I don't want her spoiled."

It cost Francis an effort to wrench himself from the circle of his happiness—every part responding smoothly to every other part—and go down to Bridgehaven to take the examinations which he had missed in the

spring. But he had to do it. There was no other way to gather up the threads which he had dropped.

Eleanor drove him to the train. Neither of them said much as they sat side by side in the peculiar intimacy which a carriage seat affords. But their silence was eloquent of all sorts of things in the way of love and trust. Not even the sober, questioning look which she gave him, as he looked down on her from the window of the train, marred the perfect confidence of their relation.

In Bridgehaven Francis found himself at times very busy and at other times with hours of leisure on his hands. Between examinations he was free to amuse himself. He did this chiefly by writing to Eleanor—pages and pages of lover's litany. He had never written to her before, and he found that the mode of expression opened a new channel for his devotion. But he also spent a good deal of time in walking and thinking, and he was rather surprised to find how glad he was of a chance to get away thus by himself and review his beautiful summer. Even his love seemed to need the sovereign act of meditation in order that it might become completely his own. The late September days were warm; and he lay for hours at a time under a slowly flushing maple tree in the outskirts of the city.

He was very happy: there was no doubt whatever about that. His life had borne a fruit of love that gladdened his soul. The process had been inevitable. The fruit had been always instinct in him; and, now that it had ripened, the whole universe was secretly gratified. Yes, it was even a cosmic matter—his love and

Eleanor's. They had come together because the very stars had conspired to bring them. In this realisation he found a deep restfulness, a sense of the eternal oneness and rightness of things.

But!

How startled he was when the all too familiar conjunction gave the steering wheel of his mind a deft turn, and he found himself challenging his satisfaction, searching it and probing it to see if it were all complete! At first he rolled over on his face, underneath his maple tree, and groaned indignantly. But then Eleanor's eyes swam before him, and he understood that he must not insult her love by refusing to let it stand every and any test.

Well, then: what was this question which he had been about to put to himself?

Was he utterly satisfied? Did human love express all of divinity that he was capable of receiving? Married to Eleanor, occupied with a useful, remunerative work, was he going to feel that his nature had expanded to its uttermost possibility, that he had quite fully merged himself in the heavenly Presence which had always lured and tormented him? Was there anything besides this human ecstasy which he must have?

("Steady!" said Eleanor's voice in his inner ear. "Steady, now! Think bravely and answer honestly.")

Yes: there was something. As soon as he let himself face it, he knew what it was. It had been harassing the tail of his eye ever since he returned to Bridgehaven. The Catholic Church. Never had a letter from Eleanor filled him with rapture that he had not longed

to run and lay it before the altar of Saint Joseph's; never had a dream of love lingered like music in his awakening soul that he had not instinctively started to go and give thanks at Early Mass. Almost every afternoon he had thirsted for Benediction. He had had to take a sort of subconscious precaution to go from his home to the college by streets which made a wide circuit about the Catholic church. Human love was so nearly the best thing in life that it made him long intolerably for the very best.

As soon as he recognised this admission and let it stand squarely before him he was amazed and sobered. He had honestly thought that the old passion was dead in him. What was he going to do? Eleanor was not here to help him, and there was no one with whom he could take counsel. He sighed heavily, as he felt the smoke of the old battle roll back upon him and knew himself to be once more in for strife and difficulty. The stars came out and a belated moon rose upon him before he left his maple tree that evening.


The upshot of his long meditation was that he admitted that nothing can take the place of the direct appeal of God to the soul in solitude. Human love is a marvellous medium; but it is coloured and troubled, it stains with its own ecstasy. The beauty of nature is awful, but it is impassive and impersonal. The Catholic Mass is really the most perfect of all the expressions of God-in-His-world, for it is both human and impersonal; it speaks a secret message to each heart, but speaks it in the midst of a multitude. It is the established symbol of the religion that concerns itself pri-

marily with the Incarnation. It is the supreme object lesson of the supreme truth. That being so, it is, of course, of first importance.

But! Again came the twist of the word on his mind, and he found himself running against a baffling wind. The Church which has cherished the Mass has managed to surround it with so many dogmas and traditions that it is inaccessible to a Protestant mind. Only by pitting his own private interpretation against that of the Fathers and Councils can a person like Francis find the significance which is dearer than life to him. He dare not do this. Therefore, the situation is hopeless on every side.

Thus began a struggle which had need of all the humour, fortunately lurking in it, to relieve its tension. Day by day, hour by hour, Saint Joseph's church drew Francis, and Francis refused to go. He could picture the priest standing before the altar and the people kneeling around it; he could hear the music and smell the incense and follow the course of the mighty prayers to their great conclusion. Then he could feel the hush—God being made man—and his spirit fell prostrate. But, no, he could not go; for he did not belong there. His mind was as resolute to reject the essentials of dogma as his soul was eager to welcome the spiritual truth. Since he could not give himself wholly, he must stay wholly away. Rather than run a risk of catching a glimpse of Saint Joseph's towers, he made a frequent *détour* of nearly a mile.

In his letters to Eleanor he tried to keep what he laughingly called his "relapse" from appearing too seri-



ous. But she understood him, and her response was sympathetic.

"I thought it would happen," she wrote. "A thing can't take hold of the depths of you as the Catholic Church did two years ago and be dislodged. It is probably the strongest force in your life (yes, dear beloved, the very strongest!) and you will always have to reckon with it. Go on; fight the battle out again. Perhaps you will reach some new conclusion."

But when she came back to Bridgehaven—very suddenly, a full week before she was due—Francis was startled to see dark circles under her eyes.

XV

IT was late on a Saturday evening that she returned; and on Sunday afternoon they went for a long walk. Each understood that the other desired space and freedom and solitude; so, with mutual, tacit consent, they headed for the open country. So long as the city pavements were under their feet they said little; but as soon as the fields lay about them, "Now tell me everything," Eleanor demanded.

Her tone was of one who already knows all that there is to be said, but, for that very reason, feels a consuming interest in it. In spite of their dark circles, her eyes were as steady and restful as ever.

Francis hesitated only an instant, to take a long, full, grateful look at her. Then he obeyed her literally, telling her everything about his difficult week, even to the reluctant challenge of his love and the recognition of a divine necessity that lay beyond it. When he came to this point, her lips winced slightly, but her eyes shone.

"Thank you for telling me that," she said. "I was afraid you wouldn't."

"I shall always tell you everything," he replied.

"But now what's to be done?"

She did not let the question dwell on the personal note which it had struck, but swung it back to its main

issue, confronting him with it. He was ashamed that he could only shake his head.

"I wonder if there aren't some things in life that just can't be decided," he suggested, apologetically.

"Not the most important things," she demurred. "I guess this is a sort of Jacob's angel to you. You've got to wrestle with it until it blesses you."

"And leaves me halting?" mused Francis.

Again her lips winced.

"At least, you see that life just won't let you give it up," she mused in her turn. "It brings you back to it again and again."

"But may that not be to try me?" he queried. "Perhaps it's a temptation instead of a duty or privilege. People talk very glibly about right and wrong; but honestly, I think it's often very hard to tell the one from the other."

"That's true enough," she admitted. "Jacob may have thought he was dealing with a thief in the night. But, anyway, angel or thief, he had to go on wrestling; there was no doubt about that."

"What about you?" Francis enquired presently. "There was a time when the thing meant more to you than to me. Have you been quite content since we gave it up?"

"Yes," she replied slowly. "Yes, I think so. You remember that, in the first place, I told you simply that I wanted to *know*, one way or the other. Our study last winter seemed to leave no doubt in my mind. And, then, last summer——"

She broke off; and, reading her vivid face, he under-

stood that her love for him was at present leaving no empty nook in her universe. He caught her hand and kissed it. But, in an instant, she swung the subject once more away from their personal relation.

"I suppose there was never yet a deadlock that lasted forever," she said.

They talked so long and so earnestly that the autumn afternoon waned before they were aware of it, and the first stars found them far from home.

"Why, see how late it is, and see where we are!" Eleanor suddenly exclaimed. "I was planning to take you home for supper."

"Well, I'm not hungry," Francis replied. "Are you? No? Then let's take our time about going back. There'll be a moon in a few minutes."

It was an enchanted dusk through which, ceasing to talk, they found themselves wandering. In the west a pulsing of sunset lingered; and in the east the moon rose, golden and majestic. The two radiances wove the dusk into a shimmering fabric, a translucent veil, cast over the shadowy meadows and the low hills, and holding the vague stars in a dim net. Save for the vibrant song of the crickets, the silence was profound. Now and then the lovers paused on a bridge and listened to see if they could hear the voice of the brook slipping underneath. They walked hand in hand, in a fathomless peace.

"Oh, everything must be all right," Eleanor murmured once—"in such a serene world, with such chances for love."

"Certainly, God is in the midst of us to-night," Francis replied.

Even when their returning feet picked up the city pavements once more, and city lights burned about them, the spell of their beatitude was not dissipated. They only loosed hands and walked a little faster. Neither of them spoke of Saint Joseph's, but it is probable that their feet would have tended in that direction if they had not been arrested by a sudden burst of music from an open door beside them which they had been about to pass without seeing it. Simultaneously, they came to such an abrupt pause that they wavered, like compass needles rushing into place.

"What is it?" breathed Eleanor.

"Let's go and see," said Francis.

He wheeled about, and led the way up a short flight of steps.

Inside the door they found themselves standing in the rear of a large and very beautiful church. Red sandstone pillars, rising into gothic arches, divided the place into a wide nave and two aisles. A rood screen of lovely and intricate carving separated the chancel from the nave, and behind it gleamed a gracious white altar, radiant with candles. Three priests in rich vestments and two little acolytes in red cassocks and white surplices stood before this altar; and the central priest was swinging a censer. The fragrant smoke rose in a cloud, veiling the carven cross on the rood screen as the moonlit dusk outside the city had veiled the hills. On either side of the chancel the choir was singing gloriously.

1

All these details, save the cry of the music, were indistinguishable in the first general, overwhelming impression which Francis and Eleanor received as they stepped in from the street. They only knew themselves in the presence of great beauty. Not even their first Benediction in Saint Joseph's had stirred them so. The service was evidently so well under way that the ushers had gone to their seats, and nobody even turned to look at the late comers. They were grateful for this. Keeping close to each other, they stole to the centre of the church, where they could look up the broad vista of the centre aisle directly at the altar.

"Trapped again!" whispered Francis humorously. His spirit sought relief.

"It's destiny," Eleanor whispered back. "But how much more beautiful than Saint Joseph's! I wonder why."

When the music had sung itself out, and the two acolytes had departed with the smoking censer, and the congregation had multitudinously sat down, Francis and Eleanor slipped into the rear row of seats. Here two surprises assailed them. The one was the sound of their own native tongue echoing from a reading desk just outside the chancel; the other was the sight of the Book of Common Prayer in a book rack before them.

"Why, Francis!" Eleanor whispered, seizing the little volume and rapidly turning its pages. "We can't be in an Episcopal church!"

She was so incredulous that she listened to the words of the Second Lesson as if they must indeed be in the ancient tongue which she had expected to hear.

Perhaps it was strange that the two young thinkers, especially Francis, had never heard of the Catholic revival in the Episcopal Church. It would seem that their earnest enquiry must have revealed the significant tendency. But they were young, and their education and environment had fostered no such discovery. Moreover, until this particular evening, the time had not been ripe. Life has a way of reserving its most important revelations until their effect is assured.

The time was ripe now, however, beyond any manner of doubt; and the golden, comforting fruit fell lightly into their waiting hands. As, in the seclusion of their seats, they looked on at the beautiful service, watching and listening, lending themselves to all that was said and done, they divined—intuitively and vaguely at first, more and more confidently by and by—that here was the answer to their problem, the goal of their quest. The people about them were of their own world, not altogether strangers as in Saint Joseph's. Francis recognised a friend of his father's and several acquaintances of his own; and Eleanor counted half a score of persons whom she knew very well. This was reassuring. It made them feel that they were where they belonged, among their own kind. Moreover, there was evidently a wide latitude of practice among these worshippers. Some of them crossed themselves at the end of the creed; many of them did not. At the name of Jesus some of them bowed, some of them held their heads erect. They were all sincere and attentive, however: of that there could be no doubt. Their Catholicism (if that was the name for it) apparently understood and accepted their

Protestantism. Could it be that this church lent itself to both tendencies?

Yet there was no mistaking its preference. The clouds of incense had emphasised that, and the symbolic robes of the priests, and the altar lights. There was in the chanting of the familiar Episcopal prayers a note of adoration which springs only from a Catholic heart. When, divesting himself of his splendid robes, the preacher stood in the pulpit above the congregation, he made the sign of the cross, and many followed his example—while many, again, did not.

He was a large, benevolent looking person, this preacher, with shrewd eyes and a humorous mouth; and he talked of the Kingdom of Righteousness as if it were a practical matter of daily life. All things are spiritual, so he said. The commonest objects about us exist only that they may shadow forth, each one its own particular aspect of divinity. It is to reveal this divinity that the Christian Church has its being; and, in pursuit of the revelation, it has built up its elaborate and significant ritual. "God has a good many facets, and so His Church has to have as many as possible, that it may dart its people's hearts full of the beams of truth." "During the dark and the early middle ages, things got mixed up and perverted, so that the divine rays were broken and humanity got the better of divinity. The Reformation was necessary and inevitable. But, like many good causes, it went too far; and now the Church is occupied in feeling its way back, clearing its facets, recovering its first admirable intention." "The early Church took its inspiration directly from Christ.

It knew what He wanted, and proceeded to try to work His will. We cannot be mistaken in harking back to that first glory of the Incarnation. It was true then; it is true now; it will be true forever." "Neither must we ever forego the habit of searching honesty which, here in America, is our Puritan heritage. We must be true to ourselves, to our past, to all that we have learned through our mistakes; above all, we must be true to our future, and to the ideal of Christian unity which Christ Himself has set before us. Only when all the experiences and tendencies of the Christian Church are reconciled in one willing, spontaneous confession of faith, can that ideal be realised."

The stalwart spirituality of the preacher's words and manner, combined with the humorous worldly wisdom of his face, made an impression of manifold persuasiveness. Here was nothing vague, yet nothing circumscribed; here was reason and faith, here was dream and substance—all one familiar, everyday experience. Above all, here was the note of a thrilling summons, a call to help the world on the highest plane possible to it. Francis's eyes burned, and his hand, surreptitiously clasped in Eleanor's, grew cold with excitement.

"Do you want to speak to him?" the girl asked, when the service was over, the lights on the altar were quenched, and the people were streaming out. She had knelt a long time for the final prayer, and had risen with pale cheeks.

"No, not to-night," Francis replied. "I've got to take my bearings."

He passed his hand across his forehead, as if the very clarity of his vision had bewildered him.

"I'll come back to-morrow."

He had forgotten that to-morrow he was to take his final examination.

XVI

THE Reverend Benjamin Hartley—Father Hartley, or even sometimes Father Ben, as many of his people called him—sat in his little study, off the sacristy of Saint John's, early on Monday morning. He had not come here to stay, for he was as apt as any other star-hitching clergyman to have "blue Mondays," and he had set his heart on a restful trip into the country this serene autumn day. But first he wanted to make some notes on a matter of parish expediency which had been presented to him, and to jot down a few ideas for a sermon which had insisted on coming into his head in the middle of the night. He sat before his writing table, with his pen poised, thoughtfully searching for a concise and accurate phrase.

He was, as has already been said, a large man; and the general impression of his personality was not what is commonly called spiritual. As compared with his slim and ascetic young curate, he seemed a robust pillar of the world. The curate's dark eyes were dreamy; Fr. Hartley's were grey and penetrating. The curate was pale and serious; Fr. Hartley, even at the end of Lent, had always a cheerful colour. The curate spoke slowly, with downcast eyes; Fr. Hartley's words tumbled over one another in their haste to get out, and his eyes directed them to person after person in his congregation.

There was nothing "visionary" about Fr. Hartley; yet it was emphatically evident that he was quite at home with visions. As he sat at his desk on this Monday morning, snugly filling his black cassock, he looked as if he had lately come from a sagacious inspection of the battlements of Heaven.

The two doors behind him were open—the one from his study into the sacristy, and the other from the sacristy into the church—and he presently became aware of a murmur of voices in the remoter region.

"Is Mr. Hartley here?"

This in unfamiliar accents, evidently those of a young man.

"Fr. Hartley is busy. I think you can hardly see him this morning," the curate—Percy Randolph by name—replied in his most gently immitigable manner.

"Very well; I'm sorry."

The stranger accepted his dismissal without appeal; but his tone made it apparent that he was in truth very sorry. He turned to go away, and his footsteps lagged disappointedly.

Fr. Hartley frowned. His hand instinctively fingered the edges of a letter which he had that morning received from a theological seminary, asking him if he had need of a new curate and recommending an admirable young graduate. Then, with a switch of his mind, he rather ruefully regarded the mileage book which lay ready to bear him into the country. But his hesitation did not last long. Francis's unhappy retreat had not carried him to the door of the church when he heard the curate come hurrying after him.

"Wait, please. I was mistaken. Fr. Hartley desires to see you," he was informed in a tone of some embarrassment and of annoyance paradoxically mingled with penitence. "This way, please." And the thin black figure guided him back to the door of the sacristy.

"But," began Francis, when he stood on the threshold and Fr. Hartley's grey eyes were scrutinising him, "I don't want to interrupt you. You were busy. Let me come some other time."

"I wasn't busy," the rector replied, speaking with slow deliberation, as if each word were a footstep, feeling its way along an unexpected and unfamiliar path. "I was just getting ready to go into the country; and I have the greatest mind in the world to ask you to come with me."

His conclusion gave the effect of arriving successfully at a happy destination. He smiled pleasantly.

"Why!" exclaimed Francis, startled. He thought of his examination which was due at eleven o'clock, and a curious look, half rueful, half amused, passed over his face. "I'd like nothing better. I will," he concluded unhesitatingly.

"Good! I've got luncheon enough for two. My housekeeper always estimates my appetite by my size. She ought to know better by this time, but the theory seems to her too logical to be abandoned. You're sure this doesn't interfere with your plans for the day?" Fr. Hartley turned back from the wardrobe where he was hanging his cassock, and gave Francis a troubled glance. "It seemed to me that you looked—but, of course, it's none of my business."

Francis flushed.

"I was going to take an examination," he confessed. "But it's in a subject which I have already given up once, and which I am now going to drop quite finally. I may as well tell you that it's your church which has made me do it. I want to study for orders. And, naturally, I can hardly wait to tell you all about it and to ask your advice."

Fr. Hartley smiled responsively at this boyish outburst, but he also raised his eyebrows.

"I never saw you in church before last night," he commented.

"No," answered Francis. "It was my first experience."

"Well"—Fr. Hartley slowly resumed his cassock, his eyes looking both thoughtful and amused—"I guess we'll stay here. It's only half-past nine, and we can talk for an hour. Of course, as I said, it's none of my business what you do; but it is my business to see that the Church doesn't, even indirectly, lend herself to inconsiderateness. You forget the professor who is going out of his way to give you this examination."

Francis's flush mounted to his forehead, and his eyes flinched.

"That's true," he admitted. "I'm sorry. But when a thing is very important——"

"It can wait," broke in Fr. Hartley. "That's one of the tests of its greatness. Sit down."

He led the way into his study and indicated a chair. Yet once again Francis hesitated.

"Your trip to the country," he demurred.

"That also can wait," replied the rector.

"Which means," Francis retorted, "that it is really more important than my story."

"You're as logical as my housekeeper," Fr. Hartley laughed.

Then Francis plunged. The imperative invitation, combined with his desire, made the opportunity irresistible, and he lost no more time in protestations. Sitting erect on the edge of his chair, he began his narrative.

It was not a brief story; it could not be. He had to tell how the love of beauty had swayed and tormented his early years, leading him on in an endless quest for the meaning that lies behind colour and form and all the visible glory of creation. He had to indicate the symbolic significance of the moon-grail, and to hint at Eleanor's share in the great adventure—her name stole into his narrative like the sound of a sanctus bell. Then, as well as he could, he described the growth of his academic agnosticism, and the apparently mature and solid conclusions which it had fostered in him, until Eleanor came home from Europe with her disturbing report of the power of the Roman Catholic Church. After that, he related his own subjection to the spell of the mighty ritual and his interpretation of it, his triumphant solving of the riddle of the universe in the light of the Mass.

(At this point Fr. Hartley suddenly got up and began to pace the length of the little study.)

The account of the winter was not easy, but Francis tackled it resolutely, telling as clearly as he could how

and why he and Eleanor had found it impossible to accept the religion which Fr. Ferguson had offered them. "We wanted it more than anything else, but we just couldn't take it. The dogmatic demands were too much for us." On his subsequent restless homesickness, he dwelt both painfully and humorously, making his listener smile sympathetically at his elaborate avoidance of Saint Joseph's. "And then, last night, we drifted in here; and—that's all," he concluded so abruptly that Fr. Hartley was pulled up short in his pacing.

"Well!" said the older man. "Well!"

He did not look like a person who was often at a loss for words, but he had great difficulty with his present utterance. To Francis's somewhat awed surprise, he turned and knelt before a crucifix which hung against the wall. For a few minutes, silence reigned in the room. Then he rose, and, passing his hand across his forehead, smiled humorously at his own emotion, and resumed his seat.

"Now, I guess I can talk," he said. "Sit down again. We've got a few minutes left; and, though the most of our conversation will have to prove its importance by waiting, just as I said it would in the beginning, there are a few things that, like you, I can't wait to put into words."

Whereupon, he contradicted himself by coming to a full stop.

"My son!" he said softly, after a moment, and never had Francis heard such an accent of love and authority. It pulled him out of his chair, and, before he knew what

was happening, brought him to his knees at the rector's side.

"Yes, father," he replied.

Fr. Hartley put his hand on his head, and looked searchingly into his eyes.

"You have pierced to the heart of reality, you have learned the secret of the universe," he said solemnly. "It is of the utmost, the only importance. So few people know it! And yet the poor world is hunting for truth and righteousness as never before in its life. You must go and tell them; you must show them the simple and obvious way—right in at the church door. You are right; the Church's message is precisely that of the Incarnation. It answers every possible question and meets every need. My son!"

Again his utterance became too much for him, and he broke off.

"I am very glad you have come," he decided at last to conclude, gently and simply.

"But you must go now," he recommenced almost at once, with a change of tone which brought both disappointment and relief to Francis's burdened heart. He took his hand away and rose from his chair. "Time's up. It's one of the things I most soundly believe, that no personal exaltation excuses discourtesy. You and I might talk all the morning, to our immense edification and perhaps even to the good of the Church; but, meantime, your professor would be justly indignant, and that would spoil everything. Go, take your examination. Very likely you'll fail; and that may be all the better. But I advise you to do your best. You'll have

a more comfortable feeling about the past if you deal squarely with it before you put it away."

"I'm glad you think I must put it away," said Francis, finding his voice but speaking rather thickly.

"Oh, yes!" the rector replied confidently. "You're a priest all right. And the Church and the world need you immediately."

Then he nodded and once more began removing his cassock.

But Francis did not fail in his examination. He felt that the crisis gave him a chance to see if he had latent in him any of the will power and self-control that were so apparent in Fr. Hartley. Resolutely he put the Church out of his mind, relegating it to the region of his subconsciousness, where it may be that its dynamic force set up a general agitation, affecting even the consideration of Schopenhauer's philosophy. He wrote rather brilliantly, with a fine scorn which amused his professor. But, as he handed in his paper, he said frankly:

"Professor Rogers, I owe you an apology for all the trouble I've caused you. I'm very sorry and rather ashamed; but I haven't seemed to be able to help it. After all, it's no use. You must count me out of your course this year. I'm going to study for the ministry."

Professor Rogers was too true to the spirit of his calling to give full expression to the disapproval which gleamed in his eyes.

"At least, I am glad that you made a complete piece of work of your one year," he commented drily. "Per-

mit me to say that I congratulate you on having at last made up your mind."

During the whole afternoon, while, in one direction outside the little city, Fr. Hartley paced and pondered in solitude, in the other, Francis and Eleanor sat under their maple tree and talked earnestly. The autumn day brooded about all three, imposing its confident peace. It was the season of sure, quiet fulfilment. But the three moods were different from one another. Fr. Hartley was soberly exalted. Francis was on fire with eagerness. Eleanor's eyes held a depth of sadness beneath their quick sympathy.

XVII

VINCENT and Jane did not return to Bridgehaven until after Francis's second interview with Fr. Hartley; so he was spared the immediate necessity of telling them what he had done. He tried to put out of his mind the disturbing anticipation of their disapproval. He would deal with it when the time came, but now he needed all his attention for the confirming and enlarging of his revelation.

Fr. Hartley asked him to come on Tuesday evening to the little box of a house which went by the name of "the rectory"; and there the two men talked until midnight.

Their environment seemed to Francis just what it should be—plain to the point of austerity, yet beautiful in its very simplicity. There were only six rooms in the little house, and those which Francis saw held the bare necessities of furniture. There were no pictures on the walls, but in every room hung a crucifix. The whole place gave the impression of having been swept clear for spiritual action.

That which they talked about first was the sublime meaning of the Church.

"You've got it!" the rector declared. "Don't lose sight of it. Don't let the most well meaning dogma in the world hide it from you. The Incarnation: that's the whole thing. It covers all history."

"Is dogma well meaning?" Francis asked, looking up from his contemplation of the wood fire which burned on the little hearth.

"Why, surely!" Fr. Hartley replied. "You know that. Think a minute. Dogma is a necessity. It's a kind of incarnation itself. Just as the ineffable truth of the divine indwelling had to be expressed in a particular human life, in order that we might take hold of it, so the meaning of the Church which carries on the revelation had to be expressed in definite words. Dogma's all right. The trouble lies with us when we look at it instead of through it."

"Are you going to expect me to subscribe to the Immaculate Conception and the Virgin Birth and the Apostolic Succession and——" Francis was beginning anxiously, when Fr. Hartley interrupted him.

"Where's your artistic sense, you lover of beauty? Don't you see that, once having postulated anything so holy and mysterious as God in man, a reverent feeling of fitness leads you to assume the most immaculate and consistent corollaries for it?"

"Then historic fact——"

"Is not precisely the point," the rector again broke in. "I don't mind telling you (you ought to be able to stand it) that the cause of Christianity would not be lost if the historians proved definitely that Jesus of Nazareth never existed."

Francis was taken aback. He stared at Fr. Hartley with wide eyes in which astonishment contended with dawning intelligence.

"You mean—you mean—" he stammered, "that it's the idea that matters; the principle of the thing."

"Precisely," the rector replied. "Somehow or other, nineteen hundred years ago, we got the idea and proceeded to entrust it to an infant Church. It seems practically certain that there was historic cause for the discovery, for bolts don't really fall out of clear skies. As a matter of fact, we have the four gospels, substantially alike. But even if the Church had invented the gospels to express and explain the idea which she already held, the truth would be just as valid: from eternity to eternity, God is incarnate in human flesh, and this incarnation is Christ."

Francis drew a long breath. He began to feel the expansion of a freedom of creed so infinite that he could never come to the end of it. He sat for a moment in silence, and Fr. Hartley watched him intently.

"If you don't mind," the older man said presently, "I'll tell you what mental attitude I take when I repeat the creed. I place myself before it as before a window, and look through it over a wide landscape. If it weren't for the window (shut up in my nescience as I am) I couldn't see the mountains and the sky; but the landscape's the thing that matters, not the window."

"I see," replied Francis slowly. "Yes, I see. That expresses it exactly."

"The Catholic Church," resumed Fr. Hartley (as Francis had done all the talking the day before, so the rector was doing most of it now) "has always kept her ritual true to the expression of the Incarnation. It is that which has given her her consistent power. But, in

the late dark and early middle ages, I don't need to tell you that the windows got very dirty and just had to be washed. The uproar was terrific. The pails and broom handles made a great clatter, and a good deal of the soapy water was spilt. Many people were so disgusted that, instead of waiting for their chance to see that order was restored, they broke away and refused to look through the windows any more. It was foolish in them; for, of course, they had to have windows of some sort, and they were put to a great deal of trouble and expense in contriving new ones for themselves. I have occasionally tried to look through two or three of them; but they command a different angle of vision, and I have never been able to make the landscape 'compose' so well from them as from our own.

"The plain truth seems to be"—the rector suddenly dropped his figure of speech and spoke directly—"that the whole modern world is sick with longing for precisely what the Catholic Church has to give it; but—what with prejudice, ignorance, perversity—it doesn't understand what ails it. It despises the Roman Church—sometimes justly, sometimes unjustly—and the Protestant sects are too meagre and limited to satisfy it. It thinks it has outgrown all churches, all formulated religions, and cares for nothing but worldly righteousness and prosperity. It is a pathetic, a tragic, age in which we live, my son. We can't study it too carefully, nor listen too long and earnestly to its cry. For it wants just that which we hold in our hands—the sufficient, obvious Bread of Life—and it will not take it. I

beg you to come and help me try to give it to the people."

Fr. Hartley's voice broke. His sturdy features maintained their composure, but his shrewd grey eyes were dimmed. He got up and walked to the wall against which hung the crucifix.

Francis rose too. He came and knelt at the foot of the crucifix. That was his answer.

"Why," asked the younger man, five minutes later, when the ensuing silence had run its course, "why don't we have a manger for our symbol, rather than a cross?"

"Because"—Fr. Hartley looked up quickly—"the Atonement is the active result of the Incarnation. If God is in man, He suffers and strives, dying daily, until man gets rid of his sin. He saves him by dying and rising again. His agony wrings him, and His inevitable return gives him fresh hope."

"So that remorse is the Christ in us?"

"Surely!" the rector replied.

"And the more we suffer for one another——"

"The more Christlike we are."

"But see here, Fr. Hartley." Francis turned restlessly in his chair, and laid his arm along the back. "My father and mother are going to suffer when they know of my new decision. That won't be because of sin."

"Sin," the rector pondered, "is the most intricate and baffling thing in the world. That's why we need a God to save us from it. It isn't always deliberate and ugly; sometimes it's entirely innocent. Blindness and ignorance are sin. Your father and mother can't possibly

help being ignorant of your Catholic vocation; yet their ignorance does offend against the truth of things."

"You are perfectly sure, then, of my vocation?" asked Francis after a thoughtful minute.

"Aren't you?" replied Fr. Hartley.

"I suppose so," responded Francis. "Yes, of course I am."

But his eyes were troubled, and his face did not light up.

"It's your parents?" suggested the rector sympathetically.

"Particularly my father," Francis replied. "He and I have always been close friends."

"Well, that means that you understand each other," Fr. Hartley encouraged, "and so you won't have any ultimate difficulty in coming to terms."

"I'd like to begin studying for orders this fall," continued Francis, still sober.

"Of course!" assented the rector. "There's no time to be lost."

"But I haven't been confirmed."

"That can be arranged next week. The Bishop is going to pass through town. I'll ask him to stop over."

To his own entire surprise, Francis sprang to his feet with a brusque gesture of dissent. Something elemental and traditional rose up in him to bar the way to the abrupt change in his life. He had a flashing picture of his mother sitting alone in the magenta cushioned pew in the Congregational Church.

"Very well," said Fr. Hartley at once. "No matter how little time there is to be lost, it is always a mistake

to do things in a hurry. We'll defer the Confirmation as long as you wish."

He motioned to Francis to put another log of wood on the fire.

After this they talked about the particular character and need of Saint John's and Francis found himself delightedly looking down new vistas of the rector's spirit. From the glint in the grey eyes he had suspected humour; and he welcomed the chuckling laughter which punctuated the account of the slow growth of Catholicism in the parish.

"It's astonishing how many people are still afraid of the Scarlet Woman. She's almost as deadly a superstition as a Salem witch. When I came to the parish, fifteen years ago, there was not even a processional cross, and I nearly lost my place trying to introduce one. Ever since, I have, as it were, taken my life in my hands every time I have suggested a new Catholic feature. I have had to go slowly, slowly, and very patiently. The first time I wore a cope, six members of the congregation got up and went out of church. They fairly stormed down the aisle."

"Did they ever come back?" enquired Francis.

"Oh, yes! In time. There's something compelling about Saint John's. You just try keeping away from it.

"Even now, it will amuse you to look over the congregation on Sunday morning and see how many people refuse to genuflect. They hold themselves so protestingly rigid! Their faces are so severe! It never occurs to them—though I hint as much frequently—that, in

stead of combating a superstition, they are indulging in one."

"But the growth has been steady?"

The rector nodded.

"That's my one purpose in life," he stated simply.

Francis was conscience-stricken when he heard the clock on the town hall strike twelve. He had not meant to take so much of Fr. Hartley's time. But the rector reassured him.

"I hope this is only the first of many midnights which will find you and me together, discussing the progress of the Kingdom," he said cordially.

XVIII

COMING into harbour sounds very safe and serene and cosy; but, of course, as a matter of fact, it is one of the hardest things a ship has to do. Witness the attendance of the pilot at the harbour's mouth.

Francis had weathered the surges and gales of his ocean of speculation, and had put in confidently for the dock where he would be; but he had a desperate time making his slip. The process took him two months—a period on which he ever looked back as one of the most unhappy in his life.

His father's disappointment was the worst thing he had to bear. It was so pronounced and enduring that the son often wondered whether he ought not frankly to defer to it. What right had he to inflict such pain on the one to whom he owed most tenderness?

"Better than your old interest?" said Vincent indignantly. "It's far worse. Really, I think I'd rather see you a Roman Catholic priest. For, at least, the Roman Church has a historic standing; it is a real thing. This Anglican business—what does it mean? It gives the lie to the Reformation which produced its own Prayer Book; it's a dog in the manger; it tries to go both backward and forward. Mummery though it seems to me, there is something dignified about the Roman Cath-

olic service. But the Anglican! Son, I can't see you intrigued by such sentimental nonsense."

"But, father,"—Francis had been looking up the history of the 15th and 16th centuries—"the English Church never broke away from Catholicism. She was not purely Roman in her origin. Saint Augustine found her already established when he came to England. She made her submission to the Pope very reluctantly and never completely, and it was only to get rid of him that she entered the Reformation. The purest form of Catholicism has always existed in England."


In spite of his distress, Vincent's eyes twinkled as he heard his son thus expounding history to him.

"I guess I know all about that," he answered. "But what do you make of Oliver Cromwell? And what do you make of the name of your own precious *Protestant Episcopal Church*?"

"I make a wide circle about an anchor which holds fast," Francis replied.

"It's the spirit of the thing, however, that matters more than anything else," Vincent declared. "You can read what you choose into poor history—she is defenceless against misinterpretation; but you can't deny that the tendency of the spirit of our times is away from Catholicism into Protestantism, away from Protestantism into pure irreligion. If you want to serve the world well, you must not set up a back current."

"Why, then, is the Catholic influence growing so fast?" enquired Francis. "There are new and transformed churches every year, and thousands of confirmations."



"Not among the people who count," cried Vincent. "Of course there are still many sentimentalists in the world, and they are easy prey. But what they do doesn't really matter. You are not in their class."

Jane had less to say. She could not get her feelings into thoughts and then into words so readily as Vincent. At first she was not sure just how she did feel. The magic words, "enter the ministry,"—so Francis announced his intention to her—gratified her profoundly. She put her arms about her son's neck and kissed him on the forehead. But when she went to morning service at Saint John's she was disconcerted.

He tried to dissuade her from this step. He told her frankly that there was much about the service which he feared she might not like at first; and he urged her to begin her study of it with a plain week-day Even-song. But she was resolute.

"No, I want to see your church at its best. I know the Episcopal service. Why, I've often been at Saint Thomas's on Sunday afternoons. You talk as if I had never seen the inside of a Prayer Book."

The experience was hard for them both. Her presence made him self-conscious and—partly out of embarrassment, partly out of consideration for her—he found himself tempted to omit many of the marks of devotion which, in a purely Catholic environment, had become second nature to him. But he did not let himself do this. Already, his new loyalty governed him. When, before taking his seat, he bent his knee to the altar, he felt his mother start and turn to look at him; and, as he knelt in prayer, he could not help thinking

how funny and pitiful must be her expression of consternation. He did not want to smile just then, but he had to do so.

When the two processions entered the church, and the three priests, in their rich vestments, stood before the altar, Jane fluttered and quivered and finally put her mouth to her son's ear.

"Francis, this isn't an Episcopal church!" she whispered in deep disquietude.

For answer, he pointed to the Book of Common Prayer.

Decidedly, he should have given her some explicit warning. That was where he had made his mistake. As the beautiful service took its way from glory to glory, he felt her bewildered distress mounting steadily with it. She breathed rather thickly, and there was at times a half sobbing catch in her throat. Her reticent nature was dismayed by the abandon of worship. When, during the creed, the most of the people dropped suddenly to their knees, she looked around wildly; and Francis, slipping his hand under her arm, knew that, in this case, he had done right to remain erect beside her.

During the Celebration she sat perched on the edge of her chair, not willing to kneel, unable to lean back because of the hat of the woman behind her. Her eyes stared fixedly at the altar. Francis could not forget her; he could not even help seeing everything from her point of view. In sympathy with her, he winced at the worshipful gestures of the priest and at the sanctus bell. He was glad when the Gloria burst forth, and he could scramble to his feet.

"Do you want to go now?" he whispered.

There were actual tears in her eyes as she nodded: "Yes."

For some moments after they left the church door, neither of them found anything to say. They walked arm in arm, and he was relieved to feel that she clung to him. It was evident that she was struggling with a complex emotion which she herself did not understand. Might there not possibly be a subconscious element of seduction in it? In her very rigidity of dismay before the outspoken adoration which she had just experienced, there was a kind of tribute.

But when she at last found her voice, she had nothing but expostulation to mete out with it.

"Oh, Francis! that's dreadful. How can you? It is very dangerous. It's Rome in disguise. I can't let you. It frightens me."

He was touched to perceive how her hand quivered in his arm.

"Mother," he answered, pressing her fingers against his side and speaking gently, "have you ever attended a Roman Catholic service?"

"I should hope *not*!" she declared.

"Well, then, you don't know how different it is from the service you heard this morning. Let me try to tell you."

And, all the rest of the way home, he talked about the gospel meaning—particularly the fourth gospel—and tried to show how significantly it was expressed in what he forebore to call the Mass, in the Communion service.

"God born into man, God dying for man: when we have this brought home to us every Sunday, we can't help wanting to live holier lives."

Jane listened, and her face had at times almost a wistful look (John was her favourite gospel); but she shook her head.

"It's very dangerous," she insisted on repeating.

That afternoon she tried several times to speak to her husband about the situation, but she was baffled by the difference in their points of view. A common apprehension was theirs, but not a common language with which to discuss it. Finally she took refuge in the evening service at the Congregational Church and asked the pastor to make an appointment for Francis to come and talk with him.

Francis was dismayed at this engagement. He was beginning to feel that he had opened his heart to quite enough people, and he shrank from another unsympathetic discussion. But when he told Fr. Hartley about it, the rector encouraged him.

"After all, it's only fair. He is still your official pastor. Really, I think you owed it to him in the first place to tell him what was going on. Give him a chance. You'll find that he has a good deal to say."

Which was true. The Reverend Henry Lawrence talked for an hour to Francis, appealing to his loyalty, to his common sense, assuring him that the Congregational service meant every bit as much as the Catholic.

"Then why doesn't it show it?" cried Francis. "It gives no hint of the Incarnation, has no incitement to worship. It is cold and formal, impersonal. If people

are made to feel themselves in the very presence of God, they can't go on sitting upright in their pews."

"People are always in the presence of God," Mr. Lawrence demurred. "Even when they are working in their gardens or cleaning their automobiles."

"Then why have church services? We come together, don't we, for the express purpose of realising our divine situation?"

"Partly, yes; largely. But also to hearten one another and exhort to good works."

"That's it!" said Francis. "I always feel as if the Congregational Church were a kind of social service club."

Mr. Lawrence raised his eyebrows.

"Well, that's not so bad," he commented.

"No," Francis admitted. "It's excellent, so far as it goes. But I want a church to go farther. I want it to hold up before me the love of God, until I am prostrate in worship before it—body and soul."

This was indeed opening his heart. He had not meant to say so much, and his voice shook. What was there about Catholicism that prompted one to such wholesale overstepping of the usual bounds of reticence? Mr. Lawrence came to his rescue with a polite winding up of the discussion. Probably he himself was embarrassed. There was certainly a faint touch of distaste in his voice as he said:

"We try to make it apparent that we love God in our church; but it seems to us, on the whole, more acceptable to do it by good works than by lip service. Candles and incense do not commend themselves to us

as necessary. Every man to his own disposition, however. We are sorry to have you go."

"Never mind, my son," Fr. Hartley comforted Francis that evening. "There is a danger in emotionalism. You'll run up against it by and by, and realise that the sectarian churches have reason for their profound distrust of it. But the way to manage it is not to shut it out, for it is the wellspring of religion; but to harness it up to a rigid dogma, and then to exploit it thoroughly."

"Oh!" cried Francis, illuminated. "That's one of the reasons for dogma."

Fr. Hartley nodded.

Another disturbing influence was supplied, during these trying days, by Percy Randolph, the curate of Saint John's. This young man took prompt occasion to make Francis's acquaintance and to assume what he took to be his rightful share of the Catholic instruction which was in progress.

"Fr. Hartley is a wonderful man," he remarked mildly. "The Church could not dispense with him. But he has to be supplemented by people like me—people who hold fast to law and order. He is not too liberal for his own good—his doctrine is sound enough; but sometimes he is rather dangerously misunderstood. For instance, did I hear him telling you the other day that the Eucharist is a symbol?"

Francis felt a leaping impulse to rebuke this eaves-dropping; but then he remembered that the conversation to which the curate referred had been held in the nave

of the church, and might have been overheard by any passerby. So he contented himself by replying:

"You didn't listen quite closely enough. It was I who made the remark, and Fr. Hartley who assented to it."

"Well, it's dangerous," the curate continued, unabashed. "I have thought it my duty to tell you that I find it safer to ignore philosophical quibbles and to stick to solid fact."

"Unfortunately," answered Francis rather drily, "it is precisely the quibble which makes it possible for me to be confirmed."

"I'm sorry." The curate was very sober. "There is already too much of that spirit in the Church."

After this he lost not an opportunity of dropping dogmatic hints in Francis's path—veritable boulders they were; and he loaned him a small library of theological books. Francis did not want to borrow these, but he had no courteous choice but to take them, when he found them waiting for him beside his hat.

It was a kind of courtesy, too, that kept him from betraying the curate's interference to Fr. Hartley. He knew that the young clergyman was exceeding his bounds.

If Francis had been less deeply in earnest, all this disapproving advice would have troubled him less. He really knew what he had to do and how he had to do it. But the process of learning had strung his soul to a sensitive pitch, and had left it open for all the winds of heaven to blow upon it. He could not help his unhappy murmurs of response. The wind of affection made its appeal; he loved his father and mother. The wind of

loyalty disturbed him sorely; he could not bear the term "renegade." Even the curate made him take serious counsel with himself to determine whether his belief was really robust enough. He grew so restlessly uneasy that he induced a final reaction in himself, and once more gave up the whole perplexing, tormenting business. After a sleepless night he came to Fr. Hartley and told him that he was going to remain a Congregationalist.

"All right," the rector surprised—and perhaps a little chagrined—him by saying. "You must of course do what you think best."

Then, for three days, he was wildly care-free. He did not tell any one—even Eleanor—what was the matter; but he astonished his little world by his exuberance. His father watched him anxiously, and his mother amused him by taking covert occasion to feel his pulse. Eleanor could hardly keep up with him on their long, swift walks.

On Sunday he announced his intention of going to church with his mother, and she assented with a glance of curiously mingled alarm and gratification. But, in the middle of the long prayer, he could suddenly stand it no longer. The thought of the great service, rising majestically to its climax, over yonder, just a block away, was too much for him. Giving his mother's hand a humble, apologetic squeeze, he slipped out of the pew and left the church. Breathlessly he raced along the block, ran up the steps of Saint John's, burst in at the open door, and fell on his knees just in time to join in the general confession.

Fr. Hartley expressed no surprise when, at the end

of this morning service, he found Francis waiting for him. He only smiled a little.

"Yes," he said, "the Bishop passes through on Tuesday. I have asked him to stop."

Vincent would not hear of coming to his son's confirmation. Francis hinted once at the possibility; then was sorry that he had spoken, and said so, apologetically.

"I'm sorry, too, boy," commented the father. "I suppose you realise that we are both going to have something to be sorry for pretty nearly every day of our lives henceforth."

"Oh, dad!"

Francis's tone was forlorn.

"Is it worth it, son?"

Francis hesitated.

"I don't seem to have any choice but to say that it is, father," he answered at length, very soberly.

He went back to his room, heart-sick, and got out his crucifix and looked at it almost bitterly.

But Jane and Eleanor knelt side by side at the early Mass, during which Francis was received. Jane had not intended to kneel, but Eleanor's sympathetic example persuaded her. Francis's heart yearned so tenderly over them both that he had to force his mind to ignore them in order that he might attend to the great words that were being said over him and that were effecting such a great change in his life. The result was that his mental state was divided. Part of his nature had to stand guard over the other part. This was a disappointment to him, his first experience of the important truth that one's emotions are not essential to

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one's salvation. Even in his distraction, he had not the slightest doubt that that which was happening to him was of the utmost sublimity. His patience had its reward in the thrill which the firm, down-gathering pressure of the Bishop's hands gave him—"Defend, O Lord, this thy child"—and, later, in the mystic touch of the wafer on his tongue. Yes, at last, he was in harbour; he was where he belonged.

One week later he was in a theological seminary in New York, working hard to catch up with his class and already cherishing hopes of outstripping it.

XIX


NEVER having had anything but a transient and superficial experience of a big city, Francis soon found himself in for a winter of discovery, the richness and complexity of which astonished him.

His Bridgehaven life had been sheltered and partial. The exigencies of human nature did not allow the members of his social circle to be all alike, but, for the most part, their variations only stood for different points of view of the same objects. They had almost identical standards and interests. They were all too intelligent not to know that other standards and interests existed, and occasionally they discussed them in an open-minded tolerance. But their talk was from the outside, and did not get at the heart of the matter in hand. Moreover, an academic tolerance generally connotes a certain amount of condescension.

Socialism, for instance. Francis had listened to many a careful analysis of this modern theme, and had even now and then ventured a contribution to its discussion. He had read several books about it. But it had never come to him; he had never felt one throb of the passion it vaguely understood, must lie somewhere at the heart of it. He and his Bridgehaven friends had been talking of an interesting tendency of the times." "As he had taken his bearings in the old and

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As soon as he had taken his bearings in the old and

very plebeian section of New York in which his Seminary was located, he found that his environment opened a whole new world to him teeming with issues and problems which he had never more than half suspected. He was ashamed of his old ignorance, genuinely appalled at his old indifference. With all his heart, he set about rectifying his impression of the universe.

The first friend whom he made among his classmates was a fiery young reformer, already a "red card" Socialist, Paul Redfield by name. This individual disconcerted him by leaning over the back of his seat in the midst of a particularly inspiring lecture on the mysticism of Thomas à Kempis and whispering, "Tommyrot, isn't it?"

"I wish you hadn't done that," protested Francis, a little annoyed, at the close of the lecture. "I was greatly interested, and was following closely."

"I knew you were," nodded his new acquaintance. "That's why I did it. You needed a jolt. You're too good for that sort of thing." He looked at him with bright eyes, and slipped an arm familiarly through his. "I guess you're another person to whom I've got to prove that this isn't the 14th but the 20th century."

"It isn't any particular century half so much as it's eternity," answered Francis, meeting the bright glance with his own steady, reflective gaze.

And on this basis of difference, they settled down to the development of their friendship.

Paul Redfield lost no time. That very afternoon he took Francis for a walk through some neighbouring slums, and gave him a relentless dose of human misery.

He showed him a small, dark room, with one window looking into a court, in which two families lived and toiled ceaselessly at the fashioning of artificial flowers, earning three cents a bunch.

He showed him a squad of pale, stunted children—some of them only babies—staggering under great bags of rags which they were carrying to a paper factory.

He marched him through street after street of filth, where the children played in the gutters, where even the keen autumn air had a taint, where hopeless faces stared from unspeakably dirty windows.

He made him sit down on a bench in a small park and study the dejected figures, drooping listlessly in their seats.

“Down and out, every one of them, poor devils! Why? Because they are weak-willed and lack enterprise? Not a bit of it! Though, even so, they wouldn’t be to blame and would deserve a helping hand. No, sir; they’re beaten because they never had a chance. This precious democracy of ours has made things impossible for them. That man over there—I know him—worked in a factory which allowed him to poison his lungs with gas; then cut off one of his fingers and threw him out. That woman went to the bad to earn some money for her sick mother; and now her reputation won’t let her keep a position. That boy took a job as a stoker and went off his head. That——”

But Francis stopped him. His eyes were haggard with the long revelation.

“Wait,” he said, moistening his lips. “I don’t think

"I can stand any more at present—unless there's something I can do about it."

"Exactly! Precisely!" Redfield wheeled about on him, and laid his hand on his shoulder. "I knew I could trust your reaction. There is something you can do. You can join our Party and help us get industrialism revolutionised. Half-way measures do no good. We must go to the root of the trouble."

"Is that the root?"

His voice was vague—not through any wandering of interest, but because, both spiritually and physically, he felt rather faint. It was an awful plunge that he had made that afternoon.

His new friend looked at him.

"It is," he declared. "But I'm glad to see that you've had too much. Come on back into the safe upper world for awhile, and catch your breath. You can be warranted not to forget."

On the steps of Francis's dormitory, Redfield turned and spoke again.

"Now you see what I meant this morning when I called Tommy à Kempis tommyrot."

Something stirred in Francis. He was quite spent. He wanted nothing so much as to get away by himself. But first he must rally to an obscure challenge, the meaning of which was too new for him to understand.

"No," he answered. "The imitation of Christ has never seemed so important to me as this afternoon. I think that's the real root of the matter."

Then he went off to the Seminary chapel.

Having been introduced to the slums, he found his


way back to them again and again. Preferably he went alone; but frequently Redfield insisted on coming with him.

"I know the ways of you dreamers," he said, "how you gloss things over and idealise them until they lose all their sting. I've got to stand by you and see that the mists are kept brushed away."

"All right," assented Francis. "But perhaps you don't understand that some people have to have things idealised before they can deal with them."

He had not been in the city a month before he knew a score of poor, struggling families, and had given all his pocket money to help them. In six weeks he had decided to go without a new winter overcoat; and in two months he had pawned his watch. He could not wait for the remote reforms on which Redfield was so set.

Just at first he was rather dismayed at the outcropping of this new interest on the very threshold of his Seminary course. He had thought that, at last, he was going to be able to give himself wholly to one pursuit, to bend all his energies in one direction. He had learned from experience that a compelling preoccupation has something fatal about it, and that it cannot be dismissed nor even argued with. It is a divine necessity, springing from the depths of life. Therefore, after his first afternoon with Redfield, he stood prepared to find himself unable to attend to his reading and lectures so closely as he desired. But, to his immense and grateful relief, he found that the impulse which had prompted him to stand by Thomas à Kempis was a persistent one, and that it held him to mystical theology with increasing im-



periousness. The more he felt the pain of the world, the more he felt the necessity of the peace of the spirit. Not for himself: he longed to be able to pass it on.

He was fortunate in having for one of his professors a man of rare spiritual insight, one whose quiet, reverent words opened up shining vistas through the intricate confusion of the religious thought of the Middle Ages, vistas leading straight to the Promised Land. They reminded Francis of forest vistas in his beloved Vermont—all full of dim, shadowy, sun-wrought mystery, with what a burst of light at the end! On his way back from this particular class-room, he almost always went into the chapel.

It was not a popular course. Only a dozen students shared it with Francis, and he was perhaps the only one who took it quite seriously. Paul Redfield dropped it after two weeks and did his best to argue Francis out from under its spell.

"It's not in line with our generation. We're practical folks nowadays and we have certain definite purposes. You mustn't hang back. You must pitch in and help."

"I'm not so sure that I'm hanging back," objected Francis modestly. "It may be that I'm feeling the wind from around the next bend. Anyway, it isn't a personal matter with me. I hear the universe speaking through the words of John-of-the-Cross as clearly as you hear it in the phrases of Karl Marx. The needs of the soul are more important than those of the body, and the latter has been getting all the attention lately."

"Soul and body are pretty closely welded, I guess," commented Redfield.

But Francis only looked at him reflectively.

Through Redfield he met a good many secular Socialists, some of them—most of them—men without any religion whatever. They foregathered in cafés of the neighbourhood, or in big dusty halls which they rented for the purpose of agitation. Agitation, agitation, agitation: that was their slogan, and Francis found it peculiarly significant of their method. One and all, they seemed bent on taking the world by the nape of the neck and shaking it. Thus, they thought, it would soonest come to itself and realise what a fool it was. But Francis had his doubts. He had never yet seen anything shaken into or out of any one.

He often wished that these vehement people would let him alone. He was interested in what they were doing and saying, and he liked to sit in the rear of their assemblies and watch and listen, coming to his own conclusions. But he did not like to be continually button-holed.

"Call them off, Paul, there's a good fellow!" he appealed to his friend. "I can't imagine why they are all so keen to convert me. I'm no use to them."

"Aren't you, just?"

Paul crossed his arms on the back of the chair, over which he was sitting astride, and looked at Francis a moment with quizzical amusement. Then he smiled outright and added:

"Honestly, I don't believe you know what a way you have with people."

Francis blushed in his boyish fashion.

"I don't know what you mean," he declared in embarrassment.

"No: exactly! Well, Mrs. Malony in 8th Street told me that you did her more good than a trip to the Battery. And old Patrick McBride said that if you came often enough, he'd be a Christian in spite of himself. He asked me to keep you away! Naturally, we want such a persuasive person persuading for us."

Francis was silent. He did not know how his colour mounted and his eyes shone, but he did know that a strangely mingled emotion invaded his heart. There was in it the old protest which he remembered from the days when Eleanor made her first appeal to him; but there was also a new flooding sweetness, incredibly gratifying. Since he had accepted and begun his work, he was glad to know that he had it in him to make it a success. His heart went out to Mrs. Malony, and he made up his mind to stop at Patrick McBride's on his way home. But to Redfield he simply said:

"Well, I've got to persuade myself first. And, even if I do, I warn you that my way won't be yours."

Not all his daily walks were taken in the poorer parts of the city. His philosopher's mind would not let him judge one aspect of his great new environment until he had tried to relate it to the whole. Up and down Fifth Avenue, through the Park, along Riverside Drive, out on the harbour, down in the rushing canyon of lower Broadway, through the residential side streets, with their demure, non-committal houses—everywhere he wandered, intent on catching the manifold meaning of

this stupendous place. The grandeur of it enthralled him. The beauty of impassive mountains was not so mighty and summoning as the beauty of this active human life. Even the physical forms which it carved out for itself—in the long, hazy vistas of streets, with the early evening lights blooming through them, in the huge crags and pinnacles of the office buildings, in the barges and ships of the river and harbour—even these tangible expressions lost nothing in comparison with the lonely mountain peaks. Their spirit was different, but was not the same God incarnate in them? God in a mood of silent peace; God in a mood of striving. The mountains seemed more aware of Him—yes. But He made the mountains first, and they have grown used to Him; the city has yet to learn. More and more every day, Francis wanted to give himself to helping on the process of enlightenment.

It did not take him long to discover certain churches where he could be sure of finding the glory of worship which Saint John's had taught him to love and need. One was in the heart of the city (such a triumphant abandon there!); one was far up town—a little place, compact of holiness. Another was nothing less than the Roman church of the Paulist Fathers. He frequented this shamelessly, knowing well that he was open to criticism, but knowing equally well that he was neither running into danger nor committing a breach of loyalty. As he knelt in the great church and listened to the swelling volume of the Gregorian music (nobler service there certainly never was), he prayed fervently for the reunion of Christendom.

Nay, but part of the trouble of disunion lay nearer home. Francis was distressed by the discovery of the dissensions within the Episcopal Church. Most of his classmates deplored the "Catholic tendency," and waxed indignant over ritualistic services. They did not know what they were talking about; but, nevertheless, they talked. Francis could seldom get them to stop and listen, while he offered the deep, cosmic explanation that was to him so eternally, immutably convincing. Paul Redfield was particularly impatient.

"Oh, come, Merwin!" he expostulated. "That belongs in the Middle Ages. It can't be anything to us now. We are modern Protestants."

Catholic, Protestant: what can one do with a Church that calls herself by two names so inconsistently? Only bring out as clearly as one can the inner meaning of her venerable institutions, and let it speak for itself.

Gradually, through this winter of growth and expansion, of keen observation, the love of his Church came to be the mastering passion in Francis's heart. It summed up and embodied for him all the visions of his youth, all the more intelligent questing of his early manhood; it answered all his riddles, it showed him the way to the working out of uttermost salvation. There was, there could be nothing which was too hard for it. Often, when he saw Redfield's eyes shine with the glory which he divined in the Socialist cause, Francis's heart beat quick with a sympathetic, but half pitying response. That was all right. There is nothing like a vast, noble, impersonal cause to bring such a

light into the eyes; but what a pity not to adopt the most inclusive cause in the world! The Catholic Church is Socialism, but it is so much more that the mind cannot stop short at any one of its issues.

XX

AS often as he could, he returned to Bridgehaven; and there he discussed all his new interests with Eleanor and with Fr. Hartley.

The former caught fire at his stories of the pity and need of the under world, and sympathised fully with his tentative plans for its succour.

"That's just what I felt when I was in London," she cried: "that our modern reforms don't go deep enough. The heart of the matter is spiritual. Our civilisation has gone wrong because it has lost touch with God; or, rather, perhaps, because it has never been in touch. That's the way to help it: to give it God. Oh! I wish I could come to New York and work with you. Not that I know how," she deprecated immediately, "but that you might be able to make some use of me. I can't bear to be staying so snugly out of things here."

Francis's eyes dwelt tenderly on her.

"I seem to be in good form for working this year," he said. "I hope to make such good progress that I can finish the course in two years. Then——"

He broke off, and they looked at each other.

"How would you like a home and a chapel among the poor people?" he asked confidently, and she lost no time in replying:

"I should love it."

But, glad and sure as his question had been, it wrought a reaction in him which clouded his face. His instinctive mental action was to locate the dear image of a home which had been evoked between them; and, to his dismay, he could find no place which was fit for it. From street to street his memory ran, hunting, challenging: Here? Or here? And nowhere could he bear to think of Eleanor gallantly making a home for him. The counter check was so unexpected that it imposed a long silence on him. When at last he looked up from a troubled study of the rug at his feet, he found the girl's eyes fastened upon him with a wistful and sombre intensity.

Eleanor had not yet been confirmed.

"Of course it's only a question of time," she tried to explain to Francis. "In fact, my first impulse was to ask Fr. Hartley to present me along with you. But, somehow, that didn't seem fitting. I thought that you ought to go all alone. And, too, I wanted to—well, I wanted to stand outside and offer you up. Do you understand?"

Her head was on Francis's shoulder as she said this and he leaned his cheek down silently against her hair.

"Moreover," she continued after a moment, "it was a step that I oughtn't to take just because it was your footstep. That's why I'm still waiting. I want to try getting along without it awhile, and then to find suddenly that I just can't do it. Do you still understand?"

"Yes," he replied gently; "of course. And I honour you for it. No matter how much people love each other, they can't see quite clearly through each other's eyes.

Nobody can be entirely sure, unless he makes up his own mind."

Suddenly she astonished him by slipping to her knees beside him and kissing one of his hands.

"Yet you are my priest," she murmured. "I want to follow you."

"Eleanor! Don't!"

He spoke almost roughly, and rose and snatched her into his arms with a touch of violence that was startling in him.

"Don't do that again. I don't like it," he commanded her.

Fr. Hartley listened more quietly than Eleanor to all that Francis had to tell him about his life in New York, but he was deeply interested.

"I was born a couple of decades too soon for the full blast of all these young problems," he said; "but I felt them coming when I was your age. They're all right, they're excellent; but their solution lies in that which is coming next—the spiritual regeneration of the world. Why stop at the lesser when one can have both lesser and greater together?"

"Exactly!" cried Francis, his face aglow. "That's what I feel more and more. I want to give every ounce of my energy to the immediate future of the Church."

Percy Randolph, the curate, shook his head at the replies which Francis made to his insistent questions.

"Dangerous!" he said. "Pernicious! There is no doubt about it that the Socialist tendency is toward free thinking. I should not dare to let myself meddle with their theories."

"You must have small confidence in yourself," Francis could not help commenting drily.

One night, when Francis and Fr. Hartley were having one of their midnight discussions before the rectory fire, the latter said musingly:

"I don't mind telling you that I have been thinking a good deal about the period of your ordination. It has seemed to me probable that, just about that time, my parish duties would get too much for me and I should feel an absolute need of another curate. Or else that—heaven forgive me!—I should have to have a rest from Percy Randolph. But I guess I'm mistaken. New York seems to have taken a strong hold on you, and probably that's where you belong. Have you ever thought of beginning at once, in an informal fashion, to try out your belief—our belief—on the poor people with whom you have made friends?"

"Yes, I have thought of it," Francis replied, staring unseeingly into the fire. "There are at least a dozen families who might let me gather them together for occasional services. But the question is: where? Their rooms are all small and crowded, and we none of us have any money to rent a hall."

"Would you let me give you some?" asked Fr. Hartley simply.

"Oh!" cried Francis, flushing with the New Englander's instinctive revolt from financial obligation. "No! Thank you very much."

"You thank me for nothing, then," smiled Fr. Hartley. "Think about it a little, my son, and see if you don't change your mind. I have a fund set aside for just

such purposes. I think you ought to be willing to help me use it."

Francis did think about it—during the most of the night; and the result was that he spoke about it the next morning at his home breakfast table. He had formed an enduring purpose to submit all his plans to his parents, no matter how trying and difficult the ensuing discussion might be. Thus would he, at least, keep in touch with them; thus would they know what he was thinking and doing. This particular matter he tried to broach as casually as if it were the most natural proposition in the world; but he instinctively braced himself to meet the shock of his father's opposition, and he was not disappointed.

"What!" exclaimed Vincent. "Be privately financed in your first position! And by a stranger! I rather guess not. That Mr. Hartley of yours is altogether too officious."

His brow clouded, and his eyes looked so indignant that Francis was dismayed.

"He's not a stranger, he's my rector," he made the mistake of replying.

"Your 'father,' isn't he?" Vincent retorted. "That in itself is enough to show what kind of man he is. Nobody with a grain of respect or consideration for the filial relation would let any one but an orphan call him 'father.'"

"Oh, dad!"

To his further dismay, Francis found himself wanting to laugh at the absurdity of this position. But that was only a surface reaction. Underneath it, his heart

was lamenting the jealous unhappiness which his father's words betrayed. He did not know what to do.

"It's nothing to laugh at," Vincent capped the climax by remarking.

Jane looked forlornly from one to the other. Her little domestic world had never given her great satisfaction, but lately it had seemed to her hopelessly out of joint. Her only son was away, preparing for a life work which she did not understand; and her husband was removed further than ever from her by the mutual disappointment which might have brought them together. She followed Francis from the breakfast table.

"I've got some money, Frank," she said. "It's in the Savings Bank. You take that. But,"—she hesitated—"I wish you wouldn't buy incense with it," she brought out pathetically.

When Francis suddenly caught her hard, angular hands and kissed them, she had no fault to find with the choking laugh which finally got itself out of his throat. She was only aware of the caress. For some minutes after her son had left her, she stood staring down at her hands.

That question was settled, then: no money from Fr. Hartley, no money from any one. When he was already inevitably doing so much to make his parents unhappy, he must avoid every turn of the screw which could be spared. But as soon as he returned to New York, he began making tentative experiments in the direction which Fr. Hartley had suggested.

Up to this time he had struck no explicit note of religion in his dealings with any of the poor families

whom he visited. Paul Redfield had warned him not to, and his own judgment had consented.

"They don't even know that I'm a divinity student," Redfield had stated. "They know I'm a Socialist. That's enough. That opens their hearts. They balk at religion."

Accordingly, it was as a budding young Socialist that Francis had been introduced into proletariat circles; and, as such, he had been unquestioningly and friendlily received. His talk had concerned itself wholly with industrial problems, or with the particular circumstances of some circle or family.

But when he came back from the spring vacation and dropped in on his friend, Mrs. Ackermann, he ventured a new kind of question:

"Do any fellows from church missions ever come to see you?"

Mrs. Ackermann glanced up from the pile of trousers to which she was affixing buttons, and her face was visited by a flash of the shrewd humour which is often one of the compensations of the poor.

"Mein Gott, yes!" she replied. "Effery few weeks. Did you nefer see none? Oh! you miss a treat. Dey are eider so serious or so gay." She pulled down the corners of her mouth and looked solicitous, then suddenly took on an air of rallying good cheer. "Dey brings a Bible, and dey reads dat verse about 'blessed are de poor.' Den dey kneels down wid der elbows on a chair, and de cat yumps on der back. Mein Gott! Last week I had to nearly choke my boy Hans wid der dish rag to keep him from laughing out."

Francis laughed sympathetically. The picture was too much for him. Then he fell sober and sat pondering the significance of his instinctive revolt from what was, without doubt, a wholly sincere manifestation of religious feeling. More clearly than ever he understood that that which is sublime must be handled with reverent dignity, lest it defeat itself by becoming ridiculous. Mrs. Ackermann's next remark startled him by its aptness to his train of thought.

"Mind you," she said, watching him closely, "I don't want for to say nodding against churches. I like some of dem fine. I was brought up what you call a Lutheran; but sometimes on Sundays I go to Saint Bridget's. Dat's all right. Wat I don't like is prayers and cats and chairs all mixed up togeder."

"Exactly!" replied Francis. "I don't either. I don't mind telling you—in fact, since we have become such good friends, I think I ought to have told you before—that I am studying to be a minister in the Episcopal Church. But I want to be very careful how I go to work. I should feel badly if Hans laughed while I was praying."

"Oh, he wouldn't!" In her interest, Mrs. Ackermann started to lay down her work; then remembered that she could not afford such a luxury of leisure, and went on sewing while she talked. "You would do it differently. You would be wat dey call a priest, wouldn't you?"

Francis was gratified.

"Yes," he answered. "Thank you. That is just what I want to be."

"Well, I guess maybe I'll come to your church," concluded Mrs. Ackermann, reaching for another card of buttons.

"That will please me immensely," responded Francis, regarding his first prospective parishioner with kindling eyes.

Other friends of his received the revelation of his real interest in life with varying responses. Patrick McBride was frankly disappointed.

"That's no way for a lad of your parts to be wastin' his time. I thought ye had too much sense. But I'm glad I didn't know it at first, for I'd niver have had aught to do with ye, and I'd have been sorry for that. Ye must jist get over the folly as fast as ye can."

A little Jewish tailor, with sunken eyes and thin, stooping shoulders, looked at him dubiously.

"My race has always insisted that God is what matters most," he remarked. "But"—he spread his hands in his characteristic gesture—"your Christianity has built up a cruel civilisation."

Francis's cheeks burned. The taunt struck home.

"It's never too late to try again, is it?" he cried. "Won't you help us?"

The tailor shook his head.

"I'm not interested any more. And I have no time."

An Italian fruit vendor meditated with dreamy eyes.

"Vell," he commented, "zere can't be too much-a help, of too many kinds. Eef I have a soul (I'm not sure), it's hungry. All ees hungry. Perhaps, eef my soul-a gets fed, my body won't feel so bad."

"That's what I hope," replied Francis. "At any rate, the soul comes first."

The fruit vendor shrugged his shoulders.

Francis was not quite sure what he wanted to do; he was simply following an impulse, a step at a time. He had come to the point where he felt disloyal, both to his vocation and to his new friends, not to have his purpose in life clearly understood. Moreover, Fr. Hartley's suggestion worked in him obscurely but mightily to set him sounding the future. The more he saw of the difficulty of the modern life of a big city and the more its pain wrung him, the surer he was that, whatever remedy Socialism may work out, the immediate appeal of Christianity to the individual soul brings the swiftest, most lasting relief. For it is in the midst of pain that Christianity triumphs most securely.

"Why wait for strikes and reforms? Why not set your soul at rest right away?" he cried once involuntarily to a consumptive shop girl who was inveighing against the whole system of department stores. And when she stared at him, uncomprehending, but not on her guard (she knew and secretly loved him too well), he continued gently, flushing and laughing in his boyish fashion, "I didn't mean to say that just then, but it's the truth. The friendship of Christ can make one's heart so happy that no floor-walker on earth can bother it."

The shop girl lowered her eyes, and her face softened.

"Maybe that's true," she replied. "I know that the friendship of some people can make a big difference."

Meantime, in his Seminary classes, Francis went on

doing the best work of which he was capable. He was eager to wrest the heart out of each subject as completely and swiftly as possible, that so he might soon fit himself for the opportunity which was gathering before and around him. Not until he was clothed with authority did he want to set his hand to his work. But he could not wait much longer.

His father loved him too well to become really estranged from him; and twice during the spring term he came down to see him. The first time he was rather anxious and wistful—though still a little defiant—presenting himself at the door of his son's room without announcement. But the boyish leap and shout of pleasure with which he was received reassured him so convincingly that a glow of gratification mounted into his cheeks. The shout was spontaneous; but it was followed by tactics which were not without guile. Humorously departing from his usual inherent habits of modesty, Francis saw to it that his father met the professors under whom he was doing the best work, and shamelessly left the way open for them to sound his praises. He even went so far as to listen, hovering in the background, apparently intent on some notes he was making. "You ought to be proud of your son. We have never had a more brilliantly promising pupil. He will make his mark." Ah! that was something like. The effect on his father was gratifying. The guarded look faded from his eyes; and he began to ask questions about lectures and reference books, and to evince a real interest in what his son was doing.

"Since you've gone in for this thing, you must make

the very most of it," he delighted Francis by counseling paternally.

His son was sure that he saw a bishopric in his eye.

But he refused point-blank to let Francis take him into any of the streets and homes of poverty. Instead, it was he who did the taking—to the Metropolitan Museum, to Mouquin's, and, in the evening, to the opera.

"Haven't lost your love for beauty, have you?" he commented with some satisfaction, as the two emerged into the midnight street and spoke the first word in three hours.

"Father! No!" cried Francis. "Why, what did you think? It's precisely beauty that I am after, hot foot, these days."

"Well, that wasn't a very beautiful street into which you wanted to take me."

"It is beautiful when you enter it instead of just looking down it. And, oh! there's so much to do there. There's nothing to do in either of the Metropolitans but look and listen."

But Vincent did not pursue the subject. It did not interest him.

The next time he came down, he attended two or three of his son's lectures, and then made a nice little dinner for him and two of his professors at the Holland House, and took them afterwards to the theatre.

"You leaven the world with the spirit," he said genially to Francis, "and I'll leaven the spirit with the world. Between us, we'll keep our balance."

But he sighed as he spoke. He knew perfectly well that Francis did not want to keep his balance.

XXI

WHEN Francis returned to Vermont that summer he realised what a great change had taken place in him. His reaction on the familiar, beloved environment was illuminatingly different from what it used to be.

At first he was startled by the fear that the mountains had lost their hold on him, that their spell was dissipated. He did not, as usual, on his arrival, instantly go away by himself to drink in the beauty of the late afternoon shadows filling the hollows of the hills. Instead, he gave his attention to asking how his neighbours had come through the winter and whether the village library was finished. Intent as he was on his questions and on the answers which they called forth, his inner self kept up a running commentary on the situation, and was troubled by it. The mountains had always stood to him for the shrines of divinity.

But when he went to bed he was relieved to find that West Mountain sprang vividly before his closed eyes; and he understood that his sidelong glances—the while he discussed the human affairs of the valley—had taken in all the details of the beauty that had always meant so much to him. Nothing was lost and a great deal was gained.

The next morning he went for a long walk; and,

though he followed the road instead of striking out across the fields, and stopped at almost every house, he came back with a tingling sense of the freshness and vigour of the mountain world. Never had the hills seemed to lift up their heads so triumphantly.

The reason must be that the King of Glory had definitely come in. Francis had found his work, had given himself unreservedly to it, and his whole world was thereby transformed. Not less beautiful was it, but less arresting—a garment which his vision could sometimes afford to neglect.

When Eleanor came she fell in with his new mood as if it were also her own. Perhaps she made it so. But her social instinct had always been stronger than his, and she already knew most of the valley inhabitants.

She was lovelier than ever that summer. Francis marvelled at her. There was a new fire in her eyes, a new sweetness about her lips. His heart exulted in the realisation that his love had transfigured her. "Mine! Mine!" he gloated, as he saw the eyes of others following her. "Oh, you poor rest of the world!"

But sometimes her presence troubled him, and then he was at a loss to account for the contradictoriness of his emotions. It was only humanly natural that his whole being should yearn towards her. In many a moment of ecstasy he held her so close, with his lips on hers, that he lost consciousness of everything save the blending of their spirits. But these trance-like sessions left him troubled. He emerged from them, groping painfully for something which he had mislaid. Half

unconsciously he released her hand and, for a few moments, stood or walked at a little distance. He never gave voice to his perplexity. It was the only thing which he did not discuss with her.

On the Sunday morning when he first drove to early Communion in the little Episcopal church in a neighbouring town he turned his horse in the direction of Eleanor's house, thinking to ask her to come with him; then inexplicably changed his mind and drove to the church alone, his head bent, his eyes troubled, his attention so distracted that his horse did with him what it would, and he was very late. In a passion of bewildered appeal, he prostrated himself before the altar and prayed harder than ever before in his life—although he did not fully know what he was praying about.

He drove home, quieted. God had come to him in the Sacrament, meeting his unknown need, fulfilling his obscure petition; and the serene summer world carried on the uplifting influence. But when, after breakfast, he sought Eleanor, he found that no one knew what had become of her.

"She was here before breakfast," her father explained, with the careful politeness which he always displayed to his prospective son-in-law. "I saw her out of my window. She had her hat on. But when I came down I found a note at my plate telling me that she had gone for a walk.

"She had changed her hat," Mr. Ramsey added, as a possibly irrelevant afterthought.

Francis spent the morning hunting for her. She was

not in any of their familiar haunts. He was very unhappy. All his vague perplexity came clouding back upon him; and through it darted the lightning flash of the explicit questions: where was she? why had she done this? what was the matter with her? The memory of the healing touch of the Bread and Wine on his lips was swept entirely from him; he thought of nothing but his love and the pain of his present loss. He understood perfectly that Eleanor had deliberately run away from him.

If there had been any one to see him, as he ranged through field after field, up hill and down hill, through woods and through swamps, hunting and calling, it would have been apparent that he had suffered a transformation. The clear light of the spirit in his eyes, the poised look of one at attention before imminent revelation, had changed to a restless fire of passionate pursuit. He had shaken off centuries of civilisation and sophistication, and was a primitive male. Very handsome he looked, with his bright hair blown back from his forehead and his lips apart. When at last there was some one to see him, she caught her breath and fastened her sombre eyes upon him; then turned away and hid her face against a tree.

The movement betrayed her, where she sat in the heart of a maple grove, half hidden among the underbrush; and, with a cry, Francis was beside her, gathering her hands into his, covering them with kisses, then folding her in his arms and holding her so close that they could neither of them speak. It was the kind of embrace that marks a crisis.

But it was soon over. With a cry which was the remotest echo of his (centuries lay between them), Eleanor fought her way out of her lover's arms and sprang from him, panting and white, her eyes ablaze.

"How dare you?" she cried in a smothered voice.

"Eleanor!"

His mood flagged so abruptly that he felt a physical swaying, and put his hand on the trunk of a tree to steady himself.


"I don't know what you mean," he added humbly.

But her mood did not flag. With her dark head high and her eyes like fountains of fire, she scorned and denounced him as if her passionate, wounded love were the hate which it seemed.

"You insult and degrade me by loving me so that you make me unfit to share God with you. Don't you understand what you have done to-day? When you wanted holiness, you left me behind; and as soon as your smug soul was satisfied, you came rushing after me and—oh! is there nothing that will wash——"

With an eloquent gesture, she stooped and caught some water from a little spring at her feet and dashed it across her lips. Then the tears surged into her eyes, but she held them proudly back.

Francis was aghast. The revelation of the secret cause of his action that morning appalled him so that he had no words with which to deal with it. His shame was so heavy that it felt like a ponderous hand on his head, crushing him into the dust. Again his physical action corresponded with his mental state, and he sat



down at the foot of his tree and hid his face in his hands.

Silence reigned. Nothing stirred in the wood. Only the little spring welled and whispered, and the sunlight played through the trees. Francis could not imagine himself as ever again looking up. He thought that if he sat here long enough he must surely be gathered back into nothingness and dispersed, so that he need never again face his identity. As for Eleanor, she would of course at once leave him, if she had not already done so. He had heard no departing footsteps, but God might have sent an angel to free her silently.

He was numbly incredulous when he heard a rustle in the leaves close beside him, and felt first a hand on his shoulder, then an arm encircling him, then lips in his hair.

"Francis! Francis!" a dear voice murmured. "I'm sorry. Forgive me. I love you so. Oh, Francis! my heart breaks."

He did not take his hands from his face, but, like a child, he leaned towards her; and instantly, hands and all, his head was gathered into a warm and tender breast. Then, for another moment or two, a new kind of silence reigned.

"But, Eleanor," he whispered almost inaudibly from his unexpected refuge.

"Yes, darling."

She bent her head still closer to his.

"I can't meet your eyes."

"Yes, you can, by and by." She spoke in a miraculously altered voice, confident and reassuring; and her

arms cradled him. "We love each other. That means that there's nothing we can't face together. I guess we forgot that. But let's wait a minute."


He could not guess what had happened to her. Probably she herself did not know; she only obeyed the conclusion. Holding him closely, she soothed him and healed the wound which she had inflicted, while the woods waited around them, and, far back among the shadows, a thrush fluted an occasional arpeggio. It was a long time before they looked into each other's faces.

But when they did so, they found that their love had made the growth of years during the sharp moments of pain through which they had passed. In fact, as they gazed into each other's eyes, it seemed to them that they had never before known what love meant. The realisation wrought a new and still more startling change in Eleanor's mood. Her serene confidence deserted her, and the touch of authority which had marked her caress. Her lips quivered, her eyes appealed.

"Why, Francis—why," she stammered, "how could I behave so? I don't understand. Please try to forget it. As if you could possibly insult me!"

Her eyes brimmed over with tears, and, this time, it was she who hid her face in his hands. Then he took his turn at reassuring her; and gradually they settled down to a long and intimate talk.

If more young lovers dared to talk thus, bravely and reverently challenging the obscure relation between the laws of the flesh and those of the spirit, there might be fewer unhappy marriages.



Eleanor sat a little apart from Francis, in an involuntary shyness which made her fearless speech seem an exquisite paradox; and he, understanding and sympathising, spared her even a touch of his hand. But his eyes dwelt tenderly on her, and her eyes made full response.

"It seems as if all our spontaneous impulses ought to have the same source," mused the girl. "But you evidently find that I come between God and you."

"No! No!" protested Francis.

Then he remembered the necessity of being scrupulously candid, and he checked his impulse of wholesale denial. "It's that you sometimes make me forget God," he stated resolutely. "When I hold you in my arms, I hold my whole universe."

Eleanor drew a long breath, and her face lighted tenderly.

"I can't help being glad of it," she confessed. "Our path would be easier if you didn't love me like that; but—I'm glad you do."

She lifted her head with a touching little gesture of pride and gratification.

"You mustn't ever forget God, however," she added instantly. "God is your business."

"Any more mine than another man's?" Francis questioned, lying down in the grass, where he might be a little nearer her without seeming to threaten her. "Why should a priest be any more actively concerned with heaven than his parish?"

"Because he mediates between heaven and earth,"

she made the obvious answer. "He is an ambassador. Of course he has to give his whole attention to his business."

Francis sighed heavily. He did not know what a weary utterance the inarticulate expression conveyed (poor Jeremiah again!), and he was surprised to feel Eleanor's fingers instantly in his hair.

"Poor boy!" she murmured caressingly. "I'll help you all I can. No matter what happens, you can always count on me."

"No matter what happens?"

The vague phrase arrested him, and he looked up searchingly into her eyes.

"Well," she expanded reluctantly, "we don't know what's before us. We only know that you are a priest, and that we've got to see to it that your priesthood is as perfect as it can be made."

Whereupon, in spite of his resolution, he caught her hand sharply and held it against his cheek.

"I suppose you are never tempted to think," she mused presently, "that human ecstasy is as profound and significant as the ecstasy of a soul alone with God."

"No," he confessed gravely. "There is nothing to equal the latter experience."

"Well, then," she continued, speaking in a voice that vibrated, and with a mystical gleam in her eyes, "why not give yourself wholly to it? Why not marry heaven? The spirit and the bride say: come. That's the life for a soul like yours."

She turned and looked at him, and he saw a new

light in her face, an unconscious glory of renunciation, a rapt apprehension of that which a life of utter worship might mean. But he did not answer her. He only reached for her other hand.

XXII

FRANCIS was as good as his hopeful word in finishing his Seminary course in two years. But he had to work hard to do it, and his last year was one of intense concentration.

It was a great year. With all his genuine, mounting desire to be of active use in the world, he could not have been the mystic he was without a strain of sheer contemplativeness. He loved to plunge deep into a volume of religious thought and hang motionless in it, poised like a fish, steeping himself in its meaning. He loved the practice of deliberate meditation, and became so proficient in it that he could abstract himself from his surroundings for an hour at a time. Above all, he loved to frequent the great services of the triumphant church which he had found in the heart of the city. There he knelt prostrate before the altar, and gave himself up—all his life, all his being—to the cause of the Church which stood for the greatest thing in the world. God's Church, man's Church: with all his heart he believed in it. He was increasingly sure that it held the key to the future.

None of his professors challenged him to define the nature of his acceptance of the ecclesiastical dogmas which formed the subject of so many of his lectures; and, though this relieved him, it also troubled him

somewhat. He knew that, if he were strictly examined, he would seem to many of his classmates no better than a heretic. But Fr. Hartley comforted him.

"It's mostly a matter of different planes of thought," he said. "You are an idealistic philosopher; and therefore, to you, the actual is an idea rather than a fact. You can't even be sure that the fact exists. But to another man, the fact is everything, and he can't understand your indifference toward it. You've got to be self-confident and determined, and stop questioning what you really know perfectly well: that your belief in the Church is profound and absolute. After a certain point, a man wrongs and hurts himself by continued analysis.

"Moreover," the rector went on, after a moment, with the peculiar gleam in his eye which Francis had come to recognise as the herald of hazard and surprise, "you mustn't forget that you are a born and bred Protestant. The tradition is in your blood. Probably you will never get rid of it. The way to manage it is to ignore it, not keep it always on the defensive by challenging it. Personally, I like a strain of Protestantism in Catholic blood. It makes for humility."

"Humility?"

Francis opened his eyes.

"Surely! It's very chastening to know that you've got something in you which, given any kind of a chance, insists on criticising that which really you love best. It's good for the spirit to understand that it can never make a full confession. Spiritual pride is almost

the worst of the sins, you know. Well, you are safe from that."

Francis pondered.

"That's rather deep and subtle," he answered. "I'll have to think it over."

But there was relief in his tone.

Eleanor was confirmed in the autumn. She came to the decision quite suddenly, and did not even write to Francis about it until the ceremony was over.

"I don't know quite why," she wrote him then. "You know that it isn't because I don't love you. Perhaps it's because I love you too much. It may be an echo of that Sunday in Vermont. Anyway, I know I can trust you to trust me."

And he did—though his heart ached. He trusted without even trying to understand.

In May he graduated with honour; and in early June he was received into the diaconate. He felt then, in a superlative fashion, as he had often felt in Vermont when he was crossing a certain sunny, enclosed field which lay before the threshold of a solemn forest. He could hardly wait, and yet reverence bade him to approach slowly.

"This one year, at least, I can have you," said Fr. Hartley. "Come and work with me in Saint John's. Then we shall see what comes next."

It was another great year—very different from that which had preceded it, different from any which he could ever know. To be actually at work in the dear, desired vineyard was solidly satisfying to him; he lent himself with zest to each task which his rector ap-

pointed. Yet never to be able to give the fulness of service, always to have to stop short of the highest ministration—there was in this an element of pain and unrest which tormented him. Often his lifted hand started to make the sacred gesture of priestly benediction; and then dropped in sudden confusion. Fr. Hartley, watching him, understood, and counselled him sympathetically.

“Patience, my son, patience!” he said. “That is what the diaconate is for. Also to give you full time to know just what you want to do.”

But, long before the year was over, Francis had shaped his future course; and he and Fr. Hartley had come to a perfect agreement concerning it. In fact, it was the older priest who first defined the situation.

“New York, Francis: that’s where you belong. I have always thought so; and this year I find that I grow increasingly sure of it. You need a free hand and a clear field; you need a responsive parish. Country people are not responsive. Even here in Bridgehaven—which is only half country—they hang back and raise objections at almost every step. I should like to see you begin at the beginning, with no prejudices to combat, and go straight—straight——”

He broke off; and his face reflected the light in Francis’s eyes. Neither of them had to name the delectable destination of that straight course.

“I’ve consulted the Bishop about it,” Fr. Hartley continued, after a pause; “and he has suggested a rather unconventional arrangement. Fortunate diocese

that we are, to have an unconventional Bishop! Saint John's has no Mission, you know. There is no special need for one here in Bridgehaven; the town is pretty well shepherded. Yet, for the good of our souls, if nothing else, we ought to have a Mission. Especially ought we to have one among people who are different from ourselves—people who can help us as much as we can possibly help them. You see where I am coming out. Yes; well, wait a minute.

"In New York, there are all too many regions which need more Missions than the local churches can support. Arrangements have been made and full permission given for Saint John's to establish one among the people whom you came to know so well when you were in the Seminary. Will you take charge of this Mission? The Bishop has authorised me to ask you."

Would he! At first there might have seemed some doubt, for he spoke no word of assent. But Fr. Hartley had only to look into his face to understand that his silence was a veritable shout of affirmation.

"Father," he began at last, haltingly—and it was well that Vincent could not hear the tone in which he spoke that word—"it is the one thing I have wanted."

He came and knelt at Fr. Hartley's feet.

He was ordained priest in June, in Saint John's, Fr. Hartley presenting him.

His father came to the service. Francis had not dared hope for this concession; and, when it was offered, he was afraid to say what he thought of it, lest his gratification should seem to take too much for granted. "Thank you, dad," was his only comment.

But he startled his mother by running into her room and hugging her.

"Father's coming to see me ordained priest!" he cried jubilantly.

"Oh!" responded Jane bleakly, the quick flush dropping out of her cheeks at the explanation.

As at the time of his confirmation, so now, during this yet more solemn office, Francis was poignantly aware of the presence of those whom he loved. His life was so interwoven with theirs that that which was happening to him must also happen to them. They were all four being ordained together—even Vincent and Jane. In their names he took his vows; and all their diverse hopes and fears he offered up to heaven for reconciliation.

At the close of the service, he was relieved by the look in his father's eyes and by the handclasp he gave him. But he was disturbed by Eleanor's pallor.

The girl's ordination present was a chasuble and a stole which she had embroidered and made up with her own hands. She gave it to her lover on the evening after his consecration, and greatly surprised him. He had not known that she was skilled in the difficult art of ecclesiastical embroidery.

"I learned it on purpose," she told him, laying the softly gleaming colours for the last time against her cheek, then heaping them in his hands. "I took some lessons from a nun. Don't you want to put it on? Wait."

She took the garments from him and laid them across the back of a chair. Then, standing before him

and looking up into his eyes, she suddenly clasped her arms about his neck and laid her head on his shoulder. When he bent over her, she turned her face so that their lips could meet.

"Now!" She released herself and stood away, steadying herself by the edge of a table. "Put it on. I'll help you."

Neither of them said a word as the folds of the chasuble fell into place over the white surplice which Francis had at hand; but a mutual change transformed them. Francis was grave, with a new, unconscious touch of authority; and Eleanor's manner was full of reverence.

"My priest!" she said, as she stepped back to look at her lover. "Francis!"

"Yes, dear," he answered, meeting her eyes with a kindling tenderness.

"You have had your authority only an hour. Have you made any use of it?"

"No," he replied, his tenderness growing, as he divined her wish and the beautiful fitness of it. "I have waited for just this."

As she knelt where she was, he stepped forward and made the sign of the cross over her bowed head.

"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace," he said.

"Amen," whispered Eleanor.

XXIII

VERMONT had no charms for Francis that summer. At first he thought he was going to be torn between the rival allurements of his love in one place and his new-found work in another; but Mr. Ramsey solved that difficulty for him by taking Eleanor abroad.

"If you're going to be married soon, you owe me one more exclusive spree," he asserted.

And the girl's acquiescence was so prompt and inevitable that, if Francis had had time, he would have wondered whether he might not justly feel a little hurt.

As it was, he had time for nothing except the swift shaping and ordering of his chapel, making every effort to have it in readiness for the celebration of his first Mass before his sweetheart sailed.

The Chapel of the Incarnation was the name of the new little sanctuary. It was not a separate building, but made use of a vacant store-room, over a shop, in a rather dreary side street, leading toward the river. No outer environment could have seemed less promising.

"That's just what I want," declared Francis. "That particular region is perishing for beauty. Moreover, it's well to emphasise the fact that inner beauty counts more than outer. It's going to be a great experience

to stroll into a section of that sordidness and find yourself suddenly in glory."

The place was very accessible. One of the main thoroughfares of the region crossed the street at the nearest corner; and the lower door of the chapel opened directly from the sidewalk. Prospective parishioners would only have to turn a little aside, mount a flight of stairs straight before them, and enter a second door leading into the chapel itself. Outside one of the windows was suspended a bell which Francis selected with care, choosing it not for its power but for its penetrating sweetness. It would never make the mistake of trying to dominate the discordant noises of its neighbourhood; but it would steal through them, irresistibly wooing the ear of the passer-by. Thus the still, small voice must always deal with the earthquake and the tempest.

Directly opposite the chapel, Francis had taken a couple of rooms in a lodging house. His mother and Eleanor had at first protested at this location for his personal abode; but when they saw that he was determined to give it a trial, they bent their energies to the task of making the rooms as comfortable and pleasant as possible. The result was distinctly agreeable—a cheerful, friendly, cosy little nook in the midst of much dreariness.

Busy as he was, Francis found time, during the week which preceded the opening of the chapel, to visit all his friends in the neighbourhood and tell them about the new project.

"It's a church for all of you," he explained, "a place

where you can get away from the world which most of you find so hard. Yes, really, I mean it—get quite away. You just come and try once, and see if I'm not telling the truth. But please don't dress up. That would spoil it all. Come just as you are."

They were all of them interested. Some of them went so far as to promise attendance.

Never was a day more sweetly propitious than that first Sunday in July. A period of heat had given way to a cool, racing breeze from the river; and the dazzling, blue, cloud-visited sky was as stainless as in Vermont. To be sure, the dirt and confusion of the streets were peculiarly offensive by contrast; but perhaps they were useful as pointing the moral of the great difference that still, after nineteen hundred years, exists between earth and heaven.

Francis was up early. Half-past ten was the hour decided upon for the service, and he wanted to make sure that everything was in immaculate order. Moreover, Fr. Hartley was coming, with a dozen choir boys and two acolytes, to help the new enterprise strike a first full note of beauty. Vincent and Jane were not there. That was both a disappointment and a relief to their son. They were in Vermont.

There was really nothing for Francis to do, as he waited his rector's arrival and the first momentous ringing of the chapel bell. He and Eleanor had dusted and polished, the evening before, until all surfaces shone. But, nevertheless, he was intensely busy. Alone with the local habitation of his dream, he gave himself over to worshipful contemplation of it, and thus took

possession of it by the means so peculiarly essential to him. In that hour of solitude, he and it entered into close personal relations; and there are no words to tell how he loved it, what he expected of it.

It was simple enough to the eye. Its richness reserved itself. At one end of the long, narrow room hung a great crucifix for which Francis had hunted long and carefully. It represented the Saviour hanging in an attitude of sorrow and pain but of such peace that its infinite reassurance flooded the beholder's heart with love and gratitude.

At the other end stood the altar—plain but admirable in the sweep of its wooden lines. On it stood a couple of candles, waiting; and over it hung an unlighted sanctuary lamp.

The chairs were ranged in two rows, with an aisle between them. They were plain, like the altar, and each one bore a book-rack equipped with a Prayer Book and Hymnal.

A wooden lectern and litany desk and a small parlour organ made up the rest of the furniture. Beside the altar, a small door opened into a large closet which, with a screen before it, served as a sacristy.

Even Francis, idealist though he was, could not understand how these few and simple appurtenances contrived to unite into such an impression of holiness and peace. Perhaps it was the shaded light from the window; more probably it was the serene presence of the crucifix; possibly it was the breathless attention of the altar, waiting to receive its soul. At any rate, whatever the cause, the effect was unquestionable: here was


a spot unlike the rest of the world, here was the threshold of heaven.

When Fr. Hartley arrived, he paused in the doorway, and Francis saw from his face that he was satisfied.

"I tell you, I envy you, boy," he remarked, as he entered and looked about. "It must be wonderful to start in such freedom, to lay your foundation with the things which most priests have to introduce cautiously and gradually. Incense! Think of beginning with incense! Why, even yet, Saint John's barely tolerates it."

Francis smiled absently, but said nothing. His whole heart was set on the chapel bell which at last, after twenty consultations of his watch, he thought he might venture to ring. Fr. Hartley understood him; and, as the younger man moved toward the bell-rope, the older man silently made the sign of the cross.

In fifteen minutes the room was half full of a motley assortment of worshippers. Eleanor would have been the first to enter, if she had not stood aside and deferred to an old woman with a shawl over her head. After all, it was fitting that one who belonged in the region should first present herself as a possible parishioner. It was also probable that Francis's heart would leap more sweetly to welcome her who might have stayed away, than his betrothed who could not choose but come. As soon as she could, however, the girl slipped into the back row of seats and knelt down. Then she rose quickly and gave herself over to an intent observation




of the people who were about to step into the first place in Francis's life.

They were all of one class—that which Paul Redfield called the proletariat; but they were more variously different one from another than a similar gathering of the class of the aristocracy. Their very costumes ensured a picturesque variety. For the best of reasons, they had none of them made any difficulty about acceding to Francis's request that they come in their everyday clothes; and the effect they presented was singularly satisfactory. Watching them, Eleanor realised as never before that there is something artificial about the look of an average church congregation, dressed up in its Sunday best. It does not seem real and solidly human, as these people seemed in their work-worn garments with their hatless heads. Some of the women had tied handkerchiefs over their hair, but many wore no covering at all. Only the little shop girl who had proclaimed herself ready to try the friendship of heaven wore a brand new and astonishing hat, drooping with willow plumes. She sat in the front row of seats.

Mrs. Ackermann was there, with a number of children, all open-mouthed with wonder. Patrick McBride was there—sceptical. The Italian fruit vendor was there. Even the Jewish tailor lurked dubiously in a corner. For the rest, there were artisans, factory hands, scrub-women; and, in the background, a local policeman who evidently thought it his duty to preside over this strange, new gathering.

The effect was satisfactory not only in the matter



of clothes but also in the look of the tired faces. Eleanor wondered a little at this. It seemed to her that she ought to feel nothing but distress at the very existence of such weariness. But, analysing her gratification and comparing it with the indifference which she felt toward most well-to-do congregations, she decided that, here again, the question was one of reality. The prosperous members of up-town churches are, all too often, half asleep in a well-fed dream. They come to church, as they perform the most of their actions, largely for convention's sake, and do not take the trouble to look below the surface of the ritual. These poor working people were alive. They knew what it meant to be so, because they had to make daily efforts to maintain themselves in the—on the whole—desirable condition. Therefore, their reaction on whatever concerned them was vital and genuine. Christ showed His profound wisdom in proffering His heavenly counsel first of all to the very poor; for they were the people most likely to respond.

But there were many bewildered people in the chapel during the progress of the first Mass which Francis offered for them. Some of them had never been to a church of any kind before; none of them had ever attended a service quite like this. When, after the lighting of the altar candles, the little procession burst forth from the door of the sacristy, singing, and, shepherded by Fr. Hartley, passed around into the chancel benches, a wave of suppressed excitement swept the congregation. Uncertainly they straggled to their feet; then, when Francis, clad in his chasuble and bearing

the sacred vessels, knelt before the altar, still more uncertainly they dropped to their knees. They did not know what was going to happen, nor what was expected of them; but they were all attention. The room was so small that Francis's every gesture was everywhere visible.

The rivetted interest made for a unity of spirit which was so impressive that, gradually, the consciousness of it prevailed over Francis. Not only did he have his people with him; but he had them all together, in a single entity which craved enlightenment. He must not fail them; their fate was in his hands. Yet not really in his. His hands availed only to pass them over to God, where they belonged. As never before, he felt the wonderful power of the Catholic ritual—its vivid portrayal of the essential meaning of life, its irresistible appeal to all the senses at once, so that, through every channel of knowledge, the truth shall flow. He bent all his energies so to concentrate his soul on the meaning of every word, every gesture, that the significance should inevitably be communicated. "Devoutly kneeling": he paused until, uncertainly shuffling, one by one, all the people got to their knees. "Lift up your hearts": yes, many of the bowed heads responded, even if Eleanor and Fr. Hartley alone joined with the choir in singing, "We lift them up unto the Lord."

As the greatly solemn office drew on to its consummation, and Francis took the sacred emblems and elements for the first time in his hands, an almost unbearable awe crept over him. Who was he—how did he dare—to do this thing? God in man, Christ, Very

God of Very God, humbly waiting here until he, Francis, should once more give Him birth: surely, he could not so hardily presume. He dropped the edge of the napkin which he had been about to lift from the chalice, and, kneeling before the altar, buried his face in his hands. But, as he knelt, two flashing visions admonished him. One was, unexpectedly, of a new moon setting behind a dark hill. The Grail! Here it was before him in very truth, no longer remote and vanishing, but waiting for his clasp. He had followed it all his life; and now that he had found it, he must not hesitate. The other vision was of the Church in all her splendour and beauty as the Bride of Christ. It was to her that the power was given, not to him, Francis, a mere sinful bit of humanity. She acted through him, and it was insufferable in him to keep her waiting a moment. With this latter vision came, in a returning flood, the consciousness of his people behind him, also waiting. He sprang to his feet and in a throbbing voice began his mighty, mysterious function of mediation. He had never so greatly put forth his will; yet, on the other hand, never had he so passively yielded himself to heaven to do what it would with him. "This is my Body": the sanctus bell pealed softly, and a great hush held the room.

When he turned with the Bread in his hands, he found all the people on their knees. Some of them were crying. The shop girl had her head in her arms, and her thin shoulders shook. Before he knew what she was going to do, she rose and ran and knelt before him. After her came a young boy, and then an

old woman. In an instant half the congregation was coming. They had all too well understood the divine invitation.

For a minute, as Francis looked down at them, he was at a loss. He had of course not intended to invite any communions this morning. He fully recognised the importance of confirmation, and of fasting and preparation. But the instinctive response moved him so profoundly that he seemed to have no choice. With a glance at Fr. Hartley—who nodded with shining eyes—he bent over the old woman, touched her hand till it opened, and laid a wafer gently in her palm. “The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee,” he began.

Afterwards, it seemed to him that that had been the supreme moment of his life.

There had been no sermon. Francis always had a feeling that a sermon interrupts the Mass unfortunately, suspending, if not entirely breaking, its spell. Moreover, he wanted his first service to his people to have as little as possible of the personal appeal. They must understand that he was there, not to scold or instruct them, but to help them to God.

Late in the afternoon, however, after he had spent an hour alone before the altar light, which now shone over a Reserved Portion of the Symbol of God, and had found his way down from the thrilling heights of the morning to a spiritual valley of deep peace, he once more rang the chapel bell and was gratified by the return of several of the morning worshippers. Fr. Hartley had gone back to Bridgehaven, Eleanor was

with her father, so that Francis was quite alone with his flock. He greeted them as informally as he had always been accustomed to greet them in their homes; and, sitting in the rear of the chapel with them, he gave them a first lesson in the use of the Prayer Book. Also he explained the significance of the light burning before the altar.

"God is not really here any more than He is in the street," he said. "The sun is not any more in the rainbow than it is in the rest of the sky. But the Sacrament and the rainbow give us a sign which we can see and love. It is just as natural for you to kneel here as it is for you to stop and look and call each other's attention to a rainbow. If you don't mind, I'd like to ask you all to bend the knee when you enter the chapel and when you leave it."

He set them an example as he rose and went up to the altar to read Evensong. His genuflection to the altar was simple and heartfelt. But he was not surprised when he saw that the people preferred to remain where they were, rather than risk experimenting with this strange new posture. He remembered his own early embarrassment, and smiled sympathetically. All in good time!

"The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him," he began in a voice of such peace and assurance that Eleanor's heart brimmed with it, as she stood, unseen, outside the door and listened to the reading of his first Evensong.

XXIV

ELEANOR sailed the next morning—mercifully at an early hour. Mercifully also, the stir and confusion of departure came between the two lovers and prevented them from reading and reflecting the pain in each other's eyes. But they were both very pale. Once, as they stood on the deck, Eleanor suddenly put her hand on Francis's arm, as though to steady herself from the shock of some obscure revulsion; but when he covered her hand with his and stepped eagerly nearer her, she caught her breath and drew away. A look of real relief crossed her face when the cry of "Visitors ashore!" was heard.

When the gang plank was lifted, however, and Francis, on the edge of the pier, looked at her from what was already practically another continent, separated from her by an effective barrier, she allowed herself a few minutes of self-revelation such as she had not indulged in for months—perhaps never before in her life. Francis was destined never to forget that face gazing down on him. Through all the rest of his life it mingled with the heavenly visions which he sometimes glimpsed in prayer, own sister to the face of the Mother of God. Its profound sadness was shot through with a high faith and a challenge which made it the most summoning thing in the world. Its love

was a torrent of light. Speechlessly, he gave it back gaze for gaze, until it glided away from him, until his eyes failed him and only his spiritual vision remained. Then, saturated and blinded with this, he stumbled back through the unfriendly streets, and found his way to the chapel, where, through the rest of the morning, he knelt, sending out prayer after prayer over the widening sea.

He was interrupted by a timid knock at the door. Evidently it had persisted unheard for some time; for, when he became aware of it, it was making redoubled appeals. The sound stole gradually into his consciousness; and, even when he recognised what it was, he had to wait a minute before he answered it. His volition was not under his control. But as soon as he could, he got to his feet and went to the door.

"Come in," he said. "You needn't knock. This place belongs to you."

Then he saw that he was looking down into the eyes of the little shop girl.

"Why, Anita!"

He did not know how subtly his kind voice erected a personal barrier, nor how quickly his eyes knocked it down again when they had taken in the full need of the face before him.

"What's the matter?"

He gave her his whole attention, alert for immediate action.

"My mother's dying."

The girl's voice was as flat as the look in her dead-tired eyes; but, for that very reason, it was tragic.

There was in it a hopeless, uncompromising acquaintance with grief. He did not need to ask, "Are you sure?" She was in no manner of doubt.

"Come in."

He took her by her cold hand, and led her into the body of the chapel, making her kneel before the Sacrament.

"Stay here. It will comfort you," he whispered. "I'll be ready in a minute."

But, as he took an instinctive step towards the altar, he suddenly paused and challenged himself: what was he about to do? Carry the Shepherd to the lamb, of course; the greatest treasure in the world to one who was destitute. Surely he could not do anything else; he must not hesitate, he must not even delay. Yet what if the lamb were wholly unworthy; what if it were no lamb at all, but an alien creature that would trample the priceless Pearl? Should he then be guilty of sacrilege, of disloyalty? For a bitter moment his soul was rent with a veritable anguish of doubt. His sense of responsibility towards his Master and towards the Church was overpowering. He must not fail them, yet he did not know in which of the two courses open to him real failure lay. Then he seemed to hear a voice saying gently, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners"; and, dropping on his knees, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, I dare not withhold Thee from one who, whether she knows it or not, needs Thee desperately. Come with me and save her. Ah, Lord Christ, Thou art already there."

Rising to his feet, he reverently removed a portion

of the Reserved Host, put it in a little silver box, designed to be worn on a cord about his neck, where it might rest on his heart; and, taking the bag in which he kept vestments and appointments ready for such emergencies as these, he beckoned to Anita and started for the door. He did not clearly know what he should do when he reached the sick room. He only knew that he must take the Shepherd.

Once out in the street he became aware that he was the subject of one of those sudden, unexpected experiences of joy in which the new Catholic life abounds. He had not considered how it might feel to move through a crowded thoroughfare, bearing God on his heart; and the wonderful, lifted sensation had the added thrill of surprise. Was this the same street which he had crossed two hours before? The touch of the silver box on his breast transformed it completely, casting a radiance over the dingy buildings, striking a high, sweet music out of the tumult of discordant sounds. He wished that his burden was obvious. He wanted every one he encountered to be aware of it. Surely they would not look so troubled, certainly not so sordid and grim, if they only realised what was, after all, no truer to-day than at any and every time, that God was in the midst of them. "Be careful!" he said involuntarily once to a man who jostled him. The man turned and stared, then went on his way with a puzzled expression.

Anita, beside him, said nothing; and, watching her out of the tail of his eye, he let her alone. She was evidently in no state to give him coherent informa-

tion about the errand on which she had summoned him. Anyway, Francis believed rather in feeling his way to a right understanding of circumstances than in asking others to guide him. The girl's very silence helped him by putting him on his guard. There was a glint of defiance in her eye. They turned two corners, and crossed a street, and entered a dark and unsavoury doorway, within which they climbed a steep flight of stairs.


"Ma," said Anita, pushing open a door, "here's a friend of mine who's come to see you."

Even on this midsummer noon, the room was rather dark; but Francis's eyes went at once to a bed in the corner, and dwelt there until they saw clearly a woman's head, propped high on pillows. She was very thin and white, and her breath laboured. She did not try to raise so much as a finger in greeting, though her eyes fastened hungrily on her daughter. Francis divined that she had been in distress lest Anita should not return in time. His heart stirred with pity. He stood back until the girl had gone up to the bed; then, in turn, he approached and touched the nerveless hand.

"I've brought you the best thing in the world," he said confidently.

He had not known what he was going to say, he did not know now whether his words struck the most persuasive key; but they were true, and he ventured them.

The dying woman transferred her burning gaze from her daughter's face to that of the stranger, and smiled a little, wanly and bitterly.



"I don't want nothin'," she whispered. "Too late," she added after an instant, with her struggling breath.

"No, it isn't too late." He knelt down beside her, that his voice might the more easily reach her ear. "It's precisely the time for it. It's the only thing you can take with you. And I'm sure you want it. God wants you, or He wouldn't be calling you now. If you didn't want Him, you wouldn't be so ready to go."

"Bah!" said the woman deliberately.

The effect was more startling than if she had used an oath. She scanned Francis's face as contemptuously as she was able, and he understood that she would have liked to shrug her shoulders. Anita started forward; then changed her mind about interfering in the situation which she had precipitated, and quietly went on clearing and cleaning a little table in the corner.

"You mean, I suppose," answered Francis, "that God doesn't seem to have done very well by you so far, and that, therefore, you don't care about trusting Him?"

He put the question with a disarming sympathy. The woman nodded.

"Nonsense!" she managed to breathe faintly.

Her eyes left his face and sought her daughter's with an appeal which he understood. Was this strange man going to be permitted to come between them during their last earthly intercourse, and interrupt the last words which they might want to whisper to each other? He rose and left the bedside, with an instinctive desire to efface himself as an individual man, to take himself

utterly out of the way, yet with a mounting desire to remain in his mediatorial capacity, easing the way between this bitter soul and the God of love who waited for it.

Anita understood him. She opened the door to a little inner room, still dingier and more cheerless than the outer apartment, and shut him in with his bag.

When he came back in his priestly robes, mother and daughter were hand in hand, the one kneeling beside the bed, and the other propped on a freshly turned pillow. The wordless intercourse passing between them made the silence eloquent. Francis sent up an equally wordless appeal for heavenly aid. He must not interrupt, but he must help; he must play the part of the divine Third Person whose presence always avails to deepen and strengthen the union between loving hearts. The meaning of his difficult priestly function was commandingly borne in upon him; and he sighed—but his heart beat high.

When he stood at the foot of the bed, swiftly and silently setting in order the table which Anita had prepared, the sick woman turned her eyes languidly in his direction. Her glance fell on a crucifix which he had hung against the wall. He thought he heard her sigh.

"You see, we can't any of us possibly suffer more than God has already suffered," he said gently.

Then, when she made no answer, he added:

"Those who suffer most, probably know most about Him. You'll find yourself capital friends with Him."

She tried to shake her head.

"Ain't no such person," she whispered.

"You see," put in Anita, at last coming to the rescue of this labouring explanation, "she's always had a hard life, and she can't believe in a God. Her father beat her and made her work in a mill eleven hours a day. My father ruined her and turned her out; he was an overseer. When I was a little kid, she worked in a factory where she caught consumption; and now we're both dying of it. I shan't last much longer than her. 'Tain't to be wondered at that she don't think much of a God who made such a world. I guess she thinks it's decenter not to believe in Him."

Francis's heart sank. These grimly short and simple annals affected him like the dropping of so many pounds of lead. To be wondered at? Indeed, it was not! He only wondered that the child of such misfortune should have been capable of any spontaneous spiritual response. For an instant he stood with passive hands. Then, in a lifting surge, the realisation of the gospel meaning swept back upon him, and he was filled with love and anger and eagerness and patient resolution and all sorts of seemingly contradictory emotions.

"Don't blame God!" he cried out in a ringing tone which startled the dying woman and made her listen to him. "It's not His fault. He did His best, nineteen hundred years ago. But we have done pretty nearly our worst. We haven't loved one another, and so we've made our earth a pitiful place. Forgive us! We've treated you so cruelly that we ought to be scourged. It's a shame, a disgrace. We don't deserve to be called

a Christian nation." His voice broke. The horror of the failure of modern civilisation came over him so poignantly that it seemed as if he could not stand the ignominy of it. "Won't you help us to begin again?" he ended pitifully.

In its surprise, the face on the pillow flushed a little, and the wandering eyes fixed themselves on the young priest's face. The grey mouth quivered with a smile.

"I—help?" the faint voice whispered.

"Yes," Francis insisted impetuously, yet with tenderness. "There is time. Show that you forgive us by refusing to let us spoil God for you."

With an eager gesture he lifted the cord from about his neck, laid the silver box on the table between the two lighted candles, and knelt down reverently before it. Then he rose and stood over the sick bed, mutely pleading, with an agony of entreaty in his eyes. His rending doubt was upon him again. How could he offer, how could he withhold the Sacrament? It was the one thing she needed, yet she would have none of it. He would almost have forced it upon her, if he had dared.

Gazing dimly up into his face, the dying woman seemed to read and ponder his expression. Her clouded eyes had a struggling look, strangely compounded of curiosity and pity, quizzical scepticism, generosity, and—yes, reverence. As Francis met them, he found himself wishing that he might have known this person. She had character. Then, with a smile and a sigh, she murmured:

"It's all right. I was confirmed when I was a girl, and I had Nita baptised; but life has been too much for me, too much for me."

"Thank God!" said Francis so fervently that the little room thrilled at his tone. He turned to the table, and knelt down and took the Host in his hand.

"Lord, forgive us," he prayed. "It is we—the whole modern world—who should make confession of sin, not she who has suffered so. Yet forgive her too, and open her heart to receive Thee now.

"The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ," he was beginning a moment later; and the walls of the room swung wide to eternity.

"Thank you," he said, when the office was ended. "That was noble and generous in you. And you won't be sorry. I think you will even find that, having forgiven us, you will know and love God the better for all that we have made you suffer. You have helped us enormously too. You have defeated the consequences of one of our worst sins."

Probably this meant nothing to her. She did not even seem to hear the words, as, once more hand in hand with her daughter, she gave herself over to the only thing she had cared for on earth, the only human tenderness that had responded to her. But there was a peace on her forehead which had not been there when Francis entered the room.

As soon as he could the priest slipped out and left them alone with the crucifix which mutely gave back sorrow for sorrow, peace for peace.

XXV

THIS death-bed episode struck the keynote of Francis's summer experience, both in the abrupt imperativeness with which it had reft him from his absorption in his love, and in the moral conviction which it had strengthened in him. As he hastened back to the chapel, with the empty box on his heart, he analysed the latter.

There is no denying the sin and suffering of the world. One may as well make an honest confession of the shame of it. But one cannot mend it best by revolution, by inciting the sufferers to rebellion and violence. There is in that measure the peril that lurks in all extremes. Moreover, there is the taint of self-seeking and the consequent lowering of standards. Yet again, what warrant is there that, so long as human nature remains what it is, any reform will be lasting, will open more than a fresh field for the practice of selfishness and greed? No: Francis put his hand to his breast with a renewed conviction that the Burden which had so recently rested there is the one sufficient remedy for the wrongs of the world. If people can only be brought to love it and understand what it means, they cannot help doing their best to live together in mutual kindness; and the desired reforms will take place of their own accord. He must spread

the news, spread the news! It had already been spread, but it had not come home to men's hearts and bosoms: he must spread it some more. All his strength, all his thought, all his love, must go to spreading it. Meantime, whenever a man or a woman, done to death by the world, forgives it as Anita's mother tacitly forgave it, and, agonisingly tempted, refuses to be spiritually despoiled by it, Christ is crucified and triumphs anew. It seemed increasingly wonderful to Francis to be a social sufferer in these days of conscious awakening, of intelligent co-operation. What a chance for patience and self-control, for that forbearance which makes for a bigger greatness than mere temporal success! If indeed the masses are coming into their own, their lovers must wish for them a large grasp of their destiny, an idea of universal service which will keep them humble and kind and tolerant. Otherwise, their supremacy, instead of advancing the world, will bring retrogression. The Christ idea: that is it, now as always. There is no getting beyond it, for it spells human perfection. God in man, man in God, love, brotherhood, freedom, peace—ah, how soon the world might be happy if it would only realise the privileges and obligations of its divinity!

With such thoughts as these, Francis embarked on the fullest and busiest life that he had ever known.

The first thing that he did was to gather as many of his people as would respond to the ringing of the chapel bell; and, after reading Evensong with them, to ask their co-operation. He explained to them that the choir from Bridgehaven could, of course, not be

expected to serve them again; and he appealed to them to help him fill their places. The nature of the response both amused and pleased him. A young man of musical comedy reputation—Dave Williams by name—volunteered to hunt up a “bunch of kids” who sometimes “suped” for him, and to see what he could do with them.

“I guess you’d better make me choir master,” he commented, thoughtfully feeling his right arm. “I was once a pugilist.”

“All right,” assented Francis, laughing. “They sound like good stuff. Bring them along. We don’t want any fighting; but we do want people who know how to fight, and then won’t. We’ll let them sing, ‘The Son of God goes forth to war.’”

A shy young woman in the background offered to play the organ for the prospective choir, and a date for the first rehearsal was set.

The result of these tentative preparations was that, by Saturday night, Francis and the new choir master had a choir of a dozen boys partially licked into shape. (The expression was Dave’s.) They were not a soulful looking lot, and Francis was glad, for the soulful looking choir boy has a sorry reputation. Irish, Italian, Jewish, one Pole, one Yankee, one German—they were a mixed assortment. It took all their leader’s tact and determination to get them into surplices. In fact, if they had not idolised him for the way in which he could sing, “Soak him again, McCluskey; you kin lick him if you try,” they would not have yielded to his persuasions.

Fortunately they all liked to sing. There was a strain of pure music in each of their families. They took to "The Son of God goes forth to war" with the fervour which Francis had anticipated; the roof rang again. They also liked, "We march, we march to victory," and, "Fight the good fight with all thy might." It seemed likely that the Chapel of the Incarnation would devote itself ostentatiously to the cause of the Church Militant. Well, that was all right. Moral conflict was as thrilling to Francis as physical conflict was abhorrent; and to turn the force of the latter into the channel of the former seemed to him one of the great concerns of religion. If he could set the vigorous feet of his choir boys to climbing the steep ascent of heaven, all would be well.

The service on the following Sunday morning was rather haphazard. The choir burst forth with responses at all sorts of wrong times, and was disconcertingly silent at other times when Francis waited in vain for it. Again and again, he had to turn from the altar and admonish it. The result was unfortunate, so far as the dignity and solemnity of the beautiful office were concerned, and at first the young priest was distressed. But he soon realised that what his people were losing in awe they were gaining in interest and familiarity. They were all on the alert, scanning their Prayer Books and prompting one another. The front row of seats offered advice to the choir in sibilant whispers. So then he dismissed his regrets. There could not be a quicker, more sane and solid way of learning the service than by working it out all to-

gether thus; and the experience made for an invaluable sense of unity. At the end of that difficult morning his heterogeneous congregation had quite a family feeling. They wore an air of achievement too, as if they had mastered something.

As for the reverence, Francis took it upon himself to make that up by a special session of worship and love on his own part. Intently, yet unobtrusively, he watched the congregation straggle out of the chapel; and noted how, here and there, some one turned doubtfully toward the altar light, perhaps wishing to make obeisance, yet not knowing how. The little music teacher who played the organ went so far as to clutch the back of a chair and half bend her knee; but at once she straightened herself and looked all around to see if she had been observed. Most of the people stamped stolidly out, without turning their heads. When they were all gone, and the chapel was empty and quiet again, Francis went and knelt at the litany desk in front of the altar. Then he rose and crossed himself and knelt again.

"For Simeon Reinhardt," he said. "For the mother whose name I don't know. For the woman with the hard eyes. Dear Lord Jesus, they don't understand. Let me worship Thee for them awhile."

It was his first experience of pure intercession, and the joy of it flooded his heart so that, at the end, he knelt motionless for a long time, rapt in a wordless communion.

On the whole, the beginning seemed a promising one. Francis was even somewhat surprised at it. Con-

fident as he was in the full power of the Church to meet all possible human needs, he had not expected an immediate response to the challenge he gave in her name. There is so much prejudice in the world, so much deadly inertia. Nor did he flatter himself that this handful of people would inevitably stand by him henceforth and forever. They might have been drawn by curiosity, by a passing whim, by any one of a score of superficial and evanescent influences. But the point was that they had been drawn, they were here; he must make the most of them. His heart yearned over them in a way that was a revelation to him of the possibilities of human love. He knew for a certainty that there was nothing of his own well-being which he would not gladly sacrifice for them. Father, mother, brother, lover, child, and servant, was he to them all at once. A priest has no need of human ties. His office includes all relations.

The summer sped. It was not all smooth sailing, nor even all direct progress. True to Francis's foreboding, Dave Williams soon grew tired of being choir master, and resigned his position, and drifted away. The Chapel of the Incarnation never saw him again. The first acolyte was so faithless to the promise which Francis thought he divined in him that he stole the morning offering one Sunday and disappeared. The congregation fluctuated. Sometimes there was hardly any one at the Sunday Mass; once in a while, on the other hand, the room was full. But, unless it had held an uneven course, the enterprise would not have seemed

part of the vital process of human development. Francis's confidence never wavered.

A few people stood by him steadfastly; and, no matter who else came or went, they were always in the chapel on Sunday morning and often during the week. Anita was one of these. In order that she might have shorter hours and a fuller measure of independence, she gave up her job as a shop girl and became an agent for a soap firm. This brought her less money; but, then, she said she needed less now that her mother was gone. The Jewish tailor was another staunch supporter. His deep racial sense of religion was touched by the spirit of pure worship which prevailed in the chapel; and, although there was also something racial which kept him from any theological concessions, he hardly ever missed a Mass. Francis understood that he was perplexed by the impulse which had brought him to the altar during the first celebration; and he left him alone to work out his own adjustment. Mrs. Ackermann was better than the half promise which she had made when Francis had sounded her the year before, and came regularly. She and Anita and one of the choir boys made up the class which began preparing for Confirmation.

Not that they had the class to themselves in close corporation. It was held in connection with the Sunday Evensong, and was therefore open to the whole congregation. Francis wanted his entire flock to share it. Into his Confirmation addresses he put all that he knew of the meaning of the supreme authority of the Church. It was a summoning experience to try to fit

the simplest words to the deepest and widest matters of human divination.

"The Church needs you," he said, "because she stands for that which is best in you; and you need her for the same reason. If you really care for love and peace, as I know you do, you must want to say so. The simplest way is to become a member of that which is all love and peace. The sooner you fall into line, the sooner the world will get rid of hatred and enmity. Other movements have the same end, and they are all good; but there is none so direct and sure as the religion of Jesus Christ."

He hesitated, and his face implored them not to misunderstand him when he asked them to refrain from communion until they had been confirmed.

"It's not that the Church would turn any one away," he explained. "She asks nothing better than to gather the whole world under her wings. But you are not fair to yourselves when you expect to have privileges without obligations. That isn't manly. I gave you the Bread that first Sunday just as you would have fed a hungry child who came to your door. I will tell you that I had never been so happy as in doing it. But you know that if the child had remained and become a member of your family, you would have expected it to obey whatever rules you had established in your family life. Otherwise, it would still have been an intruder and would have had no right to your continued hospitality. It's just that way with the Church. If you want to be one of her family (and you can't

possibly want it as much as she does), you must let her set her peculiar seal upon you."

The people listened and acquiesced. No one came to the altar rail the next Sunday. Nor did any one murmur at the restriction. Marvellous docility of the poor! The Kingdom of Righteousness will lose much if the modern aggressive spirit succeeds in banishing all that meekness from the earth.

Fr. Hartley came and went during the summer, keeping his eye on the man and the experiment that meant so much to him. Not his hand, however. He gave Francis a free rein, and did not even offer unsolicited advice. On the contrary, he professed to profit much by observing the methods of the younger man. As a matter of fact, of course, it was true that the two held frequent counsel together, and shared their ideas so impartially that they themselves did not know which was which. Their eyes focussed together on the chapel which stood to them for the cause of the Church and so for the cause of the whole destiny of man.

"If I don't watch out, I'll be caring more about it than about my own church," Fr. Hartley confessed. "That's because you've got such a clear field, such promising material, such a boundless chance. There's almost nothing you can't hope to do. I can't help envying you."

He sighed as he remembered how he had recently lost a whole family of parishioners because he had introduced into Evensong the beautiful service of the Benediction of the Host.

"There's no doubt about it that poor people are

the people to work with," he continued. "They haven't many prejudices, and their minds are open. I believe you will serve the Catholic cause more vitally here in this obscure corner than I shall serve it in Saint John's."

"But this is your service; it is a part of Saint John's," was Francis's obvious answer.

Fr. Hartley was not the only person who came and went during the summer. Vincent missed his son sorely among the mountains, and made several unprecedented excuses for trips to New York. In every instance, he came unannounced, walking in on Francis in the midst of his new activities. Once he arrived at the beginning of the Sunday morning Mass, and hid himself among the people in the rear of the chapel. His behaviour was such then that his neighbour, an eager-faced boy of fourteen (Francis had his eye on him for an acolyte), looked sidewise at him a few minutes, then edged up nearer him, and began finding the place for him in a Prayer Book.

"It's bully, ain't it?" he whispered during the creed. "Golly! but I wish I could swing that smoky little stove. You can come here every day if you want to. You don't have to pay a cent."

Vincent made no reply; but his eyes, looking on at the beautiful rite, lighted with the old, undying flame of the love of loveliness. How could he resist that candle-lit altar, wreathed in incense, with his boy in shining raiment before it, and all the people on their knees? One child's voice in the small choir soared like the lark at heaven's gate. It was a pity that Francis

could not have seen his father's face just then; but perhaps, if Vincent had known himself open to observation, he would have been on his guard.

As it was, Francis thought afterwards that, without being aware of his father's presence, he must, nevertheless, have felt its influence; for there was a new wave in the tide that swept him high on the heavenly shore, striving to gather all his people with him. "Therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven," he chanted adoringly. The incense streamed upward and bore his aspiration. When he spoke the slow words of consecration, he held his breath, seeming to catch the faint stirring of wings throughout the whole mass of creation, preparing for the divine flight of its return. As never before, he realised the supreme importance of a statement which pierces to the heart and soul of truth. He turned with God and man in his hands—the stars and the seas and the mountains, the dreams and purposes, the love and faith, the ultimate destiny of everything—and drew a long breath of deep satisfaction. Nothing more could be said or done to the world than to show it divinity.

When, after the service, his father came up to him, he all but embraced him in his delighted surprise.

"Father!"

His voice choked. A few of the lingering congregation looked on in sympathetic interest.

But Vincent was now on his guard.

"Get away as soon as you can," he said. "I want you to come uptown with me to dinner."

They had a happy afternoon together, one of their

old, unconstrained sessions of intercourse. They sat on a bench in the Park, and talked steadily. Vincent reported the news of Vermont, and Francis listened so eagerly that his father broke off once and ventured:

"You miss the old place, don't you?"

But, after a moment's reflection, Francis shook his head.

"No, strangely enough, I don't," he confessed. "I love it as much as ever, but—well, you see, it was always the spirit of the mountains that I cared for, rather than their physical shapes; and that same spirit shines through the Mass. I guess it's true that, when I hold the Host in my hands, I can't miss anything."

His voice and his eyes deprecated the movement of impatience which he evidently expected his father to make; and his whole manner pled disarmingly for comprehension. His courage was apparent. But Vincent's attention was engaged by the logical sequence of the last statement, and he ignored everything else.

"Do you mean that, Francis?" he asked, his gaze very sober and penetrating. "You don't miss anything?"

He dwelt on the final word.

Francis winced, and his eyes fell. The sudden crux was almost too much for him. Then he looked up again, with a straight, fearless glance that was yet painfully reluctant.

"Not when I hold the Host in my hands," he repeated manfully.

When Francis refused to accompany his father back

to Vermont, Vincent did not press the question. Probably he had foreseen the refusal as inevitable.

"You see, there's no one to leave in my place," the young priest explained.

"And, of course, if the chapel were closed, the whole process of creation would come to a standstill," Vincent could not help putting in, with the one touch of irony which escaped him that afternoon.

Francis was silent a minute. Then,


"It might in the hearts of the people," he said bravely. "The knowledge of it is so new to them."

After his father had left him that evening, taking the night train back to Vermont, he sat for a long time by his open window, revolving the significance of the statement which had precipitated the crisis of the conversation in the Park. Eleanor: her name was always in his mind, her dear image ever before his inner vision. On his desk was a calendar which he had made of the days of her absence; and every night before going to bed he drew an exultant line across one of the squares. He wrote to her sometimes as often as three times a day. What in the world had he meant by saying that he did not constantly miss her?

The ultimate truth: that was all. When he challenged himself as squarely as his father had challenged him, he found that he had to give precisely the same answer. He loved his betrothed more dearly than ever. When he was not on spiritual heights, his heart and mind and body clamoured for her. But when he was on the heights (and, surely, by them he should judge himself), he possessed her so intimately that she seemed

God's comrade in shaping the world. When he partook of the Bread and Wine, through which he became one with the universe, his mystical marriage was consummated. He wondered if this was exceeding the limits of a legitimate interpretation of the Mass, and concluded that there could be no limits to that which is, in its nature, boundless. No, it was wholly true: he who has God has everything.

The next morning there was no one at the early celebration which he had recently instituted as a daily event; and though in one way he was sorry, in another, he was very glad. He could not help rejoicing to find himself quite alone with his Most Dearly Beloved. The early sun—so touchingly pure and candid in the midst of the city squalor—stole in at the chapel window and caressed the quiet feet of the Christ on the crucifix. The light burned steadily over the altar, the candles took up their worshipping function, responsive to his summoning taper. Everything was very still. Even the street below had not yet engaged itself in the clamour of the day. As, robed in his priestly garments, he began the solemn office that stood to him for ultimate expression, he felt like one who ventures farther and farther into a fathomless sea. How did he dare? Now that he voiced no other explicit need than his own, he wondered at his temerity, and almost expected to see himself suddenly turn and flee. But the great words marched steadily. Gospel, epistle, glorious creed, prayer, exhortation, confession—through them he passed to a goal which appalled him by its awfulness, but the ravishing sweetness of which would by no



means let him go. Oblivious of ecclesiastical custom, he said almost the whole office on his knees, much of it with his head at the foot of the altar. When he swung the censer, he lifted his face, but kept his eyes closed against the imminent glory. "This is my Body," he faltered. It was too much for one man all alone. He could not stand it. The universe was dissolving and singing about him in the ecstasy of its own holiness. But his priestly function saved him. He thought of the people who were not there—Anita, Mrs. Ackermann, the Jewish tailor; he thought of the great city around him, of the passers-by under the window; and, officiating for them, he managed to eat and drink the Food of Mystery.

Then, for a long time, he lay prostrate, rapt in prayer.

XXVI

MEANTIME, Eleanor's letters had come as regularly as his had gone forth to her. They were beautiful, quiet letters, instinct with the spirit which had shone in her face as her steamer had borne her away from him. He had lately fallen into the habit of carrying one of them always above his heart when he celebrated Mass. They told him of all the things she was seeing and doing, especially of the services she was attending in the English churches. "Father thinks he's sight-seeing, so he's as tolerant and uncritical as a lamb. But he's rapidly learning the Prayer Book by heart. The other morning, I heard him using the *Te Deum* as a shaving song." They commented on every phase of the growth of the Chapel of the Incarnation, on almost every detail as Francis reported it to her; so that he had a singular sense of her intimate presence, of her uninterrupted sharing with him.

"It's wonderful how closely you keep in touch, way off there," he wrote her once. "You are thousands of miles away (plague take it!); yet you seem to hear every thought as I think it, and to share every experience."

"That's because I love you," she replied, "because we love each other. Nothing can ever separate us. Haven't you fathomed that fact?"

"It's fathomless," he replied in his turn, "fathomless and boundless."

It was only on looking back, week by week, that he realised any change in her letters. From day to day they seemed uniformly tender and frank. Nor was it, after all, so much a difference in them that he detected in the long run as in their effect on him. For instance, that habit of carrying one of them to the altar—how and when did it begin? He remembered poignantly that he had had to lock her first letter in an inner drawer of his desk and resolutely put the thought of it out of his mind before he could give his attention to the sermon he was trying to write. Was the change in him or in her? And what did it mean? In spite of his undoubting assurance of a growing, deepening, widening love, he was sometimes disquieted.

The trouble was that he had not yet faced the issue which Eleanor's manner and words had several times suggested to him. He had glimpsed it out of the tail of his eye, but had straightway preferred to look the other way. "The Spirit and the Bride say: Come." "No matter what happens." "You are my priest." It was strange how these broken phrases rang in his ears, as he harked back over their dear intercourse. They dominated a hundred other glowing phrases of human tenderness. Yet he persistently refused to let them challenge him.

On the morning after his father's visit, however, and after the wonderful rapture of his solitary Mass, he returned to his rooms with a hovering sense of impending crisis. He was too clear-sighted and honest not

to know, underneath all his evasions, that one vital problem yet remained to be worked out before his destiny could be quite sure of itself. It had confronted him last night; but, as usual, he had looked away. Was the time ripe now? He closed his door and locked it behind him. Surely no hour could be more propitious than that of the serene, lingering withdrawal of the feet of the Holy Spirit. He would look and see what was troubling him. He would bring all the light of his recent communion to bear on his perplexity. In quietness and in confidence would he consult his strength. He sat down at his study table and clasped his hands above a little crucifix.

Five minutes later he had unlocked his door and was fleeing downstairs with a veritable anguish in his eyes. Quietness, confidence—what did they mean? What had become of them? As the peace of a summer valley flies before the sudden tempest, as a pool is flooded and swept by the tide, so was the stillness of Francis's soul put to naught by the meaning of the question which he had asked himself. The violence of his change of mood was shattering. He ran to the nearest telegraph office and sent a cablegram to Eleanor: "Come at once. I need you." Then he set to work walking the streets, walking and walking and walking.

It was his first experience of sheer, unbearable torment; and the hell of it might have admonished him that he was wilfully out of tune with his destiny, perversely kicking against the pricks. He had thought that he knew what struggle meant; he had certainly had to fight his way to his religious position. But

that strife had been whole-souled, inevitable; and therefore it had not maddened him as did this frenzied rebellion of part of his nature against the other part. He made careful enquiries as to the minimum length of time in which a cable answer might be received; then he divided that time evenly, and walked half of it straight north toward the Bronx, and half of it back again.

He never knew exactly how far his desperate footsteps carried him; but when the watch which he held in his hand allowed him to turn right about face, he was vaguely aware of detached houses and open spaces about him. Tired as he was, he came back much faster than he went out, and had to wait in the office half an hour.

"Do you need more of me than you have?"

At last he held it in his hand, and walked slowly away with it. It had the strangest effect upon him—not the heavenly revulsion from fear to confident expectation which he had desired, but an imperative striking of the clamour of his being into a fundamental silence which he instantly knew to have held its own within him all the while. Miraculous! Yet, after a minute or two, it seemed the only natural thing in the world, and his recent fever and fury seemed incredible. With his head bent, he went to the chapel and knelt before the altar. "God," he said; "God." That was all, yet it summed up all possible prayers. That night he slept like a little child and woke with a stilled heart.

He sent no reply to Eleanor's question, for he felt that it needed none—his silence would speak for it—

self. She had understood him, and he now understood her. He was even suddenly glad that, just at the moment, there rolled leagues of sea between his lips and hers. Undistracted by her bodily presence, he had such a thrilling sense of her spiritual indwelling in him that, all day long, he seemed to be thinking her thoughts. It was he who celebrated Mass for her in the morning, but it was she who sang the Magnificat for him in the afternoon.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Ackermann stopped after Evensong to ask him if he felt ill in any particular manner, or were just tired out; and she advised him to go to bed and take a certain patent tonic which she recommended.

He was in his rooms, thinking of acting on the first part of her advice, when his heart surprised him by leaping obscurely. Ahead of his mind, it recognised a footstep on the stairs. Fr. Hartley! No, it could not be he. The rector was off on his vacation in Maine. Nevertheless, Francis ran to the door, opened it, peered down the stairway, and, the next instant, was hand in hand with the older priest.

"Father! Why, where—what—how? Oh! I am glad to see you."

Fr. Hartley was out of breath from his climb. That gave him an excuse for standing and looking at Francis a minute before he said anything. But the superbly trained self-control of his face was not quite equal to concealing a darting anxiety and concern which the younger man had never noticed in his eyes before.

"Yes, it's I," he said at last. "Forgive me for walk-

ing in on you thus. I hoped you wouldn't mind. I had to come to New York on business. Can you put me up for the night?"

Francis said nothing. He tried to speak, but found that he had no control over his voice. Instinctively putting out his hand to take Fr. Hartley's bag, he had discovered that the priest carried no impedimenta; and that significant indication of a hasty departure had touched him poignantly. He did not doubt that the rector had divined his need and had come wholly on his account. He attributed it to another miracle; and not until long afterwards did he learn of the crumpled cablegram which Fr. Hartley, even then, bore in his pocket: "Francis in trouble. See him. Eleanor Ramsey." His face quivered and he turned away with a mute gesture of welcome.

Fr. Hartley put his hand on his shoulder.

"I guess I know what's the matter, boy," he said in a tone of such tenderness and compassion, but, at the same time, of such summoning strength that Francis thought the Saviour must thus have spoken to that young man whom He loved. "I've seen it coming; and, for that reason, I hated to go so far away. But I'm here now; and you'll let me try to help you, won't you? We've all been through it—all of us who have not married. It's as bitter as death, but the other side is as calm and bright as heaven. I'm tired now, and so are you, and we've neither of us had any supper. So I'll go out and buy some chops, and we'll cook them over your gas stove, and then we'll go to bed. To-

morrow morning, we'll say Mass together, and have a talk."

But before he came back with the chops, the rector took his turn at hunting up a cable office, and sent this message to Eleanor: "All is well. Trust me."

XXVII

THERE was no one at early Mass the next morning; and, for the second time in his life, Francis was glad of the circumstance. It was a grey day—thoughtful and gentle. No sunlight came in at the windows, but the feet of the Saviour rested all the more peacefully in the cool shadows. Rain had fallen in the night, and the air was fresh and sweet. The lights on the altar bloomed out like flowers. The whole little chapel wore such an air of serene joy and confidence that it gladdened Francis in spite of himself; and with a high heart, he made himself ready to swing the door of Heaven ajar upon it.

Fr. Hartley acted as celebrant, but he included Francis in the function as much as he could—more than was customary. When he entered upon the canon, he beckoned the younger priest to come and stand in front of the altar with him; and together they partook of the Body and Blood, together they voiced their thanksgiving. Then, for a long time, they knelt with their foreheads resting against the foot of the chalice which had so divinely refreshed them. Rising, they turned and saluted each other; then cleansed the sacred vessels and put them away. After that, they divested themselves of their eucharistic garments; and,

clothed in their black cassocks, they went and sat in the rear of the chapel, near the great crucifix.

"Well!" said Fr. Hartley at last, when Francis, gazing intently at the altar light, seemed to have no immediate intention of speaking. The rector's voice was gentle, but a summons lurked in it. "This is the hour of hours, you know, for making decisions. Do you feel like stating the question? Or shall I state it for you?"

Francis did not remove his eyes from the light, but he drew a long sigh and passed his hand across his forehead, responding to the summons without exactly acting on it. As had frequently happened to him before, the Word-made-flesh seemed such ultimate, comprehensive speech that nothing more remained to be said on any subject. But he knew that human echoes must be clearly defined if they are to have any effective significance, and he remembered with what explicit intention this Mass had been said; so presently, still gazing at the light, he submitted obediently:

"Ought Eleanor and I to marry?"

Whereupon, unexpectedly, a sharp vibration of pain shot through his calmness and his face winced. The first definite statement of a familiar trouble comes as a sword thrust.

The pang played its part in recalling him from his absorption, and Fr. Hartley effected the rest of his awakening by the quick reply which he made:

"Certainly, if you want to."

Now Fr. Hartley had such a way of making unexpected replies that it would seem as if Francis might have learned not to be startled by them. But perhaps

surprise is the only habit which cannot be guarded against. At any rate, this particular astonishment was so drastic that it brought the young man's eyes leaping from the light to the rector's face and roused his entire being. He said nothing, but his face was an imperative interrogation.

Slowly the rector nodded and smiled, taking his turn at waiting a minute, while his companion settled himself on the steed of his attention which he had so suddenly mounted. The older man's eyes were steady and kind, with a gleam of amusement in them and a full ray of reassurance. He was abundantly satisfied with the effect he had produced.

"Ah! already you know what I mean," he said by and by, keenly watching the young face before him. "You are too intelligent not to understand the principle of our branch of the Catholic Church. She enforces nothing. On the contrary, she deprecates any service or sacrifice which is not so spontaneous that it stands for the dearest desire of him who makes it. If you and Eleanor want to marry each other, by all means, you must do so.

"Well, what's the matter?"

For Francis still said nothing, nor did his face clear, and, for a minute or two, a heavy silence reigned.

"It can't be that you don't really want to," the rector suggested.

"Oh, father, I don't know! I don't know myself." The floodgate of Francis's heart suddenly opened, and he burst out in a boyish confession that was utterly sincere. "I've been suffering hell for the last few days,

fearing that I might have to give her up. But now that you tell me I needn't, I am no happier. I don't know what to make of myself."

"Of course, there's no question of giving her up," put in Fr. Hartley, making another surprising turn, with his imperturbable air of going straight ahead. "You and she belong to each other, and nothing must ever come between you."

Again Francis started.

"I don't understand," he began. Then he paused.

"Yes, I do," he added softly. "Of course I do."

"I should hope so," the rector commented succinctly. "I'm not going to interpret your own love to you. But, as a sympathetic observer, I may perhaps be permitted to say that, just because the relation between you and Eleanor is one of the most beautiful I have ever known, so I feel sure that it is capable of blooming into the transcendent flower of——"

"Sacrifice?" breathed Francis.

"No," Fr. Hartley answered, "the fullest, deepest, most enduring sort of consummation, the spiritual fulfilment which can afford to ignore the physical. But, of course, one might call that another name for sacrifice."

"Would you mind telling me," Francis went on, after a moment of silence, during which his eyes kindled and he once more returned to a contemplation of the altar light, "what you consider the best reasons for the celibacy of the priesthood? I suppose I may have heard them before, but I'd like to hear you restate them."

"Unique consecration," Fr. Hartley replied, weighing his words. "That's the best reason. In fact, it includes all the others. All men are created for the love and service of God, but the priest is peculiarly so. His business is mediation between God and such human souls as cannot find Him fully by themselves. He must keep himself whole and direct and simple; he must bend his entire being to one end, forgetting everything else if need be—everything, everything else. He must be able to let himself go so completely and recklessly that he can be lost to the world. I have a friend, unmarried, who gave up a city parish and went into the heart of Alaska. There he is often out of touch with civilisation for months at a time. He glories and revels in his work; it possesses him absolutely. But, of course, he couldn't have taken it if he had had a family. Then I have another friend, married, who was tremendously useful and happy among the 'mountain whites.' But his wife fell ill and his children needed comfort and care; and he saw nothing for it but, just when his work was succeeding most critically, to give it all up and accept a call to a suburban parish. I tell you, that was bitter. His very soul bled. And he has never amounted to anything since. The fire went out of him.

"You yourself," the rector continued, when Francis still sat listening and pondering, with his eyes on the light—"would you be willing to bring Eleanor to live in this neighbourhood?"

"No." The young man shook his head. "No!" he stressed the word.

"Of course not. And though she would probably try to insist on beginning here, she would have to seek other quarters as soon as she had a child to consider. You see, you can't help yourselves. When you marry, your life is no longer in your own hands. You seem to be needed in this neighbourhood," he added dispassionately.

Francis hesitated a moment, and then he turned his eyes back to his rector's face. His expression was halting and sombre.

"Father, a priest is a man," he said. "He has, perhaps, somewhat stronger feelings than other men. How can he help himself? Can he forswear his humanity? I love Eleanor as a man loves a woman whom he wants to make his wife. Her unwedded presence is going to be torment to me."

Quickly Fr. Hartley put out his hand and laid it on Francis's arm. His kind face was full of compassion.

"I know," he said gently. "I understand. But some kind of a fight is the heritage—and, indeed, the business—of every man who expects to amount to anything. Wouldn't you rather have yours elemental and simple than complicated with all the doubts and regrets that tortured the married friend whom I have just been telling you about? Moreover, you must remember that the purpose of the whole Church, of evolution and civilisation and history, is the triumph of spirit over matter, the development of the latter into the former. You'll have in your breast a daily concrete example of the vast movement which you help to lead. I tell you,

that's great, Francis! It keeps one alive and awake and aware."

As he spoke, Fr. Hartley's face kindled, and there leaped into his eyes a sudden mystical flame of gladness which Francis had never before seen in those shrewd depths. The effect was as of the swift swinging aside of a curtain before a hidden shrine.

"To transmute everything into spirit!" he went on in a low voice, speaking half to himself and gazing at the altar light as raptly as ever Francis had gazed. "That costs and hurts and burns, but the pure gold pays for every pang. Gold! One can heap it at the Saviour's feet, and be sure that He holds it well worth His acceptance. Gold! it is the one thing that matters—the pure, shining gold of the spirit. Ah, my dear boy! we must not be content with anything less."

Francis was awed. He had never before seen the naked flame which burned at the heart of Fr. Hartley's religion, had never dared hope to see it. He wanted to veil his eyes. So many sacred possibilities suggested themselves in the leaping, glancing light.

But the rector spared the boy any lingering doubt as to what he ought or might venture to say. Rising abruptly from his seat, he resumed the practical manner that was habitual with him.

"You can't decide it to-day or to-morrow," he said in an almost businesslike tone. "Perhaps you can't decide it until Eleanor comes back. But I'd keep right at it if I were in your place. The crisis is imperative. I'll stay and look after the chapel for you. No, no!"—as Francis made a gesture of protest. "I can stay

just as well as not. I was bored up in Maine. Anyway, I have wanted a chance to come into close personal touch with this parish. I shall probably have the time of my life. Don't worry about me. Think, for one thing, what an orgy of ritualism I shall be able to allow myself!"

He laughed as he said this; but, as he looked down at Francis, his face fell back into its sober, compassionate lines.

"God bless you, my son," he said, laying his hand on the head of the boy, who then dropped to his knees before him. "He has called you to the glorious task of confounding the physical by the spiritual, or bringing to nought the things that are by the things that are not. You are going to be very triumphantly happy. You and Eleanor are going to keep your marriage in Heaven, where it was made."

Then he went out and left Francis alone with the altar light.

EPILOGUE

TWO years later, as the young moon was again setting behind West Mountain, and the early stars were trembling through the Vermont twilight, a man and a woman stood where a boy and a girl had once stood, watching the celestial consummation.

They had come down the road together this time, and had talked eagerly, the right use of prayer being one of their themes, and the baptism of Bridget and Patrick McBride being another. It was evident that life had fused all themes for them into one many-faceted significance. It was also evident that they understood and responded perfectly to each other.

They seemed to be hardly aware of the fact that, as they approached the murmuring brook, they stopped talking. Their thoughts still ran along, side by side, maintaining an uninterrupted intercourse.

"Yes," breathed Eleanor once; and, "Of course," Francis commented.

Above them, the lower horn of the moon delicately touched the tops of the trees on the mountain crest. At once they stood motionless, with their heads lifted and their eyes attentive. As the shining crescent slid down behind the dark mass of the mountain, they held their breath, and started to move nearer each other, then changed their minds and remained where they

were. But when the last thread of the upper rim had left the sky, and, for its wonderful instant, the light burned through the trunks of the distant trees, they turned and looked at each other. Their hands, hanging motionless at their sides, thrilled with a mystic clasping.

"How much more it means than we supposed!" said Eleanor gravely.

"And probably we have only just begun to understand it," Francis replied.

"It will require life after life."

"Life after life," he repeated.

"At the end, we shan't be able to tell the difference between us."

"Often I don't, now," he answered. "And so the beginning is the end, and the end is the beginning, and it is all eternity."

"I never dreamed that I could be so happy."

"Happy!" he echoed.



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